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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Karnataka & 21 other states head to SIR in April

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

The Election Commission (EC) has instructed 22 states and Union Territories, including Karnataka, to complete preparations for the final phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voters' lists, expected to commence in April. Once finished, all states and UTs will be covered.

In a letter to chief electoral officers of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Ladakh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Delhi, Odisha, Punjab, Sikkim, Tripura, Telangana, and Uttarakhand, the poll authority emphasised that a pan-India SIR had been ordered in June last year.

The EC is conducting the SIR following allegations of "vote chori" raised by the opposition Congress. Last year, the EC completed SIR in 13 states and UTs, with Assam undertaking a 'special revision'. The ongoing exercise involves nearly 60 crore electors across 12 states and UTs, with the remaining 40 crore to be covered in the 17 states and five UTs. While Bihar completed its SIR, the process remains ongoing elsewhere. The EC faced legal challenges from political parties, including Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal Chief Minister, and TMC, who opposed the electoral roll cleanup in her state. The EC had earlier claimed to find nationals from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar during Bihar's SIR; however, it did not release specific numbers or proof. Opposition parties viewed the move as a tactic to target voters not aligned with BJP and its allies. —*PTI*

KARNATAKA TO BEGIN CENSUS HOUSE LISTING FROM 16 APRIL

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

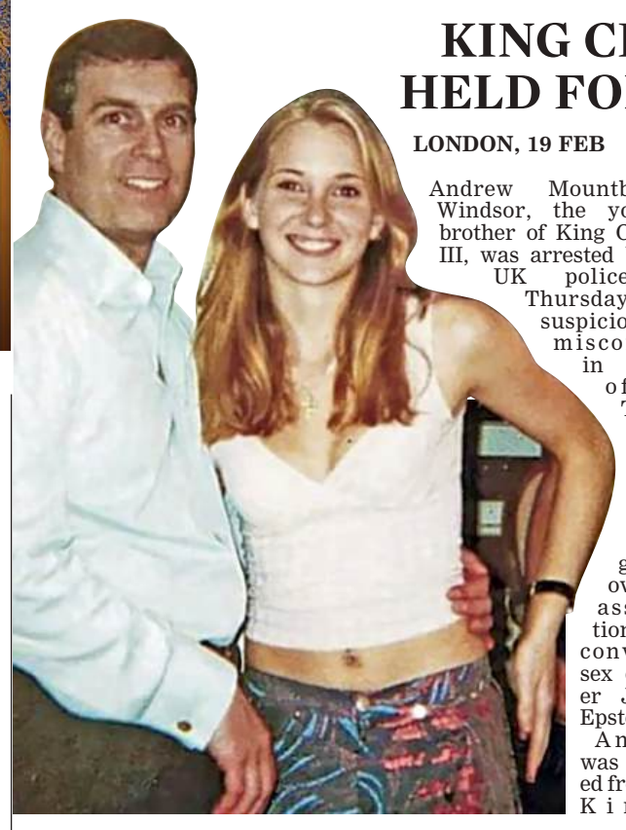
Karnataka government has announced that the House listing operations for the Census of India 2027 will run from 16 April to 15 May, 2026. Residents can participate in a 15-day self-enumeration window from 1 to 15 April before house-to-house data collection begins.

This will be India's first digital census, with data gathered via a mobile app on Android and iOS, including GPS tagging of households. The House listing phase will cover housing conditions, amenities, and assets through a 33-question survey. Citizens are urged to cooperate with enumerators or submit details online.

Phase 2, the Population Enumeration, is scheduled for February 2027. The census will also include a caste enumeration, as approved by the Cabinet. —*Salar News*

EPSTEIN FILES HAUNT THE POWERFUL

KING CHARLES' BROTHER ANDREW HELD FOR LEAKING INFO TO EPSTEIN



LONDON, 19 FEB

Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, the younger brother of King Charles III, was arrested by the UK police on Thursday on suspicion of misconduct in public office. This follows damaging allegations over his association with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Andrew was arrested from the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk, where he was residing after moving out of the Royal Lodge on the British monarch's Windsor Castle estate. He turned 66 on Thursday.

Thames Valley Police said they searching other Andrew's addresses in Berkshire and Norfolk, while he remains in police custody.

As Duke of York, Andrew had served as the UK's trade envoy between 2001 and 2011, travelling globally and having privileged access to senior government and business contacts.

According to the 3 million files released by Department of Justice including emails, Andrew was accused of forwarding government reports from official visits to the American sex offender and financier, who died in a New York prison in August 2019.

The arrest follows a series of shocking allegations over the past few weeks as the Epstein files were released by the US Congress, with Buckingham Palace issuing an unprecedented statement this month to say that it "stands ready" to support a police investigation.

Virginia Giuffre, an American woman, had alleged that Epstein trafficked her to Andrew when she was a teenager. She allegedly died by suicide in April 2025. A photograph showing him holding her by the waist has been at the centre of this claim. Andrew, who is stripped of all his royal titles of Prince and Duke of York by the King last year, has denied any wrongdoing.

Along with Andrew, US President Donald Trump features prominently in the Epstein files, being mentioned over 38,000 times. Numerous victims have accused him of rape and sexual abuse.

Epstein is alleged to have trafficked around 1,000 women, some as young as 14-years-old. —*Salar News*

GATES PULLS OUT OF AI SUMMIT KEYNOTE

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates did not deliver his scheduled keynote at the India AI Impact Summit, the Gates Foundation confirmed on Thursday. The decision follows organisers' discomfort over his appearance after his name surfaced in documents linked to the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Government sources said on 17 February that Gates' invitation, extended months earlier, had been withdrawn. The Summit, which began on 16 February at Bharat Mandapam. Gates was listed as a keynote speaker for 19 February, allotted a 12-minute slot at 11.50 am. His name disappeared from the official participant list on Tuesday.

the Gates Foundation said Gates would not speak "to ensure the focus remains on the Summit's key priorities." The Foundation will be represented by Ankur Vora, President of its Africa and India offices. A spokesperson had earlier said Gates would attend, but the plan was revised following the Epstein-related revelations. US Justice Department records include an allegation that Gates contracted a sexually transmitted disease from Epstein, which Gates' team called "absolutely absurd."

Gates arrived in India on Monday, visiting Vijayawada to meet Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. —*PTI*

West Bank: India joins 100 nations in condemning Israel

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

India has joined over 100 countries and global organisations in condemning Israel's de-cisions and measures aimed at expanding its "unlawful presence" in the West Bank. A statement was issued by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the UN on Wednesday on behalf of the 100 countries and organisations "condemning Israel's uni-lateral measures and rejecting annexation." According to the statement, the signatories "strongly condemn unilateral Israeli decisions and measures aimed at expanding Is-rael's unlawful presence in the West Bank.... Such decisions are contrary to Israel's ob-ligations under international law and must be immediately reversed. We underline in this regard our strong opposition to any form of annexation. Israel's security cabinet re-cently made it easier for settlers to get land in the West Bank. On 17 February, 85 na-tions had condemned Israel, but India was not part of the signatories of the joint statement. New Delhi later added its name to the statement.

Meanwhile, an MoU was signed between India and Israel to deepen defence ties and strengthen joint activities. Notably, India was the first non-Arab country to recognise the state of Palestine in 1988.—*PTI*

Udupi cops make 4th arrest in Navy data leak case

UDUPI, 19 FEB

The Udupi police have arrested a fourth suspect in the case involving the alleged transmission of confidential Indian Navy information to Pakistan. The latest arrest, Alif Islam (21), a West Bengal native residing in Marayur, Kerala, is linked to the leak of a classified list containing naval vessel identification numbers. Investigators said the accused allegedly shared sensitive data via WhatsApp and Facebook without authorisation. Earlier arrests include Rohit and Santri from Uttar Pradesh (Nov 2025) and Hirendra Kumar from Gujarat (Dec 2025). One suspect and the operator of the Facebook page remain at large. Islam's citizenship is under verification.—*PTI*

Give jobs not freebies, says SC

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

The Supreme Court slammed the freebies culture ahead of elections and said it was "high time" that such policies are reviewed.

Observing that the burden of populist measures falls on taxpayers, a bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant asked, "The State says it will pay. But who will pay? This is the taxpayers' money."

The observations were made during the hearing of a petition filed by the Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited which proposed to give free electricity to all irrespective of consumers' paying capacity.

"It is understandable when some people cannot afford, you have to provide. There are children who cannot afford education, so the state must provide. There are students who are bright but cannot afford to go to medical colleges. The state must help them. But persons who have the means must not be given freebies," the CJI said.

The bench, also comprising justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, warned that the indiscriminate distribution of largesse is a major hampering the nation's development.

The state-owned firm has challenged Rule 23 of the Electricity (Amendment) Rules, 2024, which imposes strict financial discipline on power distribution companies.

The impugned rule requires that any gap between the cost of supplying electricity and the tariff recovered from consumers must not exceed 3 per cent and be cleared within a fixed time. —*PTI*

Muslims break their fast during Iftar on the first day of 'Ramadan', at the Masjid-e-Noor, Dickenson Road, Bengaluru on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Software glitch derails airline check-ins

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Airlines faced check-in disruptions at several airports on Thursday morning due to a software glitch lasting over 40 minutes. IndiGo, Air India Express, SpiceJet and Akasa Air were affected at Delhi, Mumbai and other locations. Sources said the issue, from 6:45 am to 7:28 am, stemmed from Navitaire, a widely used airline technology provider that manages bookings, check-ins and departure operations. While passenger processing slowed temporarily, there were no major service disruptions. —*PTI*

B'luru woman killed as paralysed husband lies next to her

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

A 70-year-old woman was murdered in her Bengaluru home on Thursday, allegedly by a man who owed her money, while her paralysed husband lay helpless beside her. A video from the scene showed the woman lying in a pool of blood on their bed, with her bedridden husband beside her.

The victim Shoba and the suspect Shivakumar —*CREDIT*

The incident occurred on Pete Street in Nelamangala, where the couple lived in seclusion. The woman, Shobha, had been the sole caregiver to her husband for the past 10 years. Police said the accused, Shivakumar, a neighbour and wholesale shop owner who has since been arrested, allegedly targeted Shobha. He reportedly owed her Rs 8 lakh. Police said that at about 4pm, Shivakumar saw her wearing gold jewellery and followed her home. He allegedly entered the house pretending to be thirsty and attacked her. The body was found when the husband's physiotherapist arrived for a session . —*PTI*

AI SUMMIT

OpenAI to open offices in B'luru

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

OpenAI, the Microsoft-backed parent company of ChatGPT, announced it will open two new offices in Bengaluru and one in Mumbai, CEO Sam Altman revealed at the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi on Thursday.

The new offices will complement OpenAI's existing New Delhi presence, established last year.

Altman said India's homegrown tech talent, strong AI adoption, and supportive government policies position the country to shape the future of democratic AI at scale.

The company serves over 100 million weekly ChatGPT users in India, including students, developers, educators, and enterprises, while its global user base exceeds 800 million weekly active users.

Anthropic, creator of Claude, opened its India office in Bengaluru earlier this week. The he Bengaluru office is positioned as a hub for deepening sector-specific collaborations while supporting India's fast-growing AI ecosystem. OpenAI has not yet disclosed the number of jobs it plans to create with its new Bengaluru and Mumbai offices. —*Agencies*

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MODI CALLS FOR DEMOCRATISATION OF AI

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Calling for democratising AI, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the 'MANAV' vision for a human-centric approach and use of the fast emerging technology with a strong accent on sovereignty and inclusivity.

Inaugurating the AI Impact Summit here on Thursday, he said that India believes that artificial intelligence will truly serve the world when it is shared and its codes are open, asserting that the country does not fear AI but sees a fortune in it and a blueprint of tomorrow.

Welfare of all is "our benchmark" for AI to ensure that humans don't become raw material, he stressed.

"I present the M.A.N.A.V. vision for AI where M stands for moral and ethical systems, A for accountable governance, N for national sovereignty, A for accessible and inclusive, V for valid and legitimate," Modi said.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, French President Emmanuel Macron, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Swiss President Guy Parmelin, and the CEOs of leading technology companies were those present at the Summit.

Modi said India's MANAV vision will become a crucial link for humanity's welfare in the AI-driven world of the 21st century.

AI, he said, must be given an open sky, but command must remain in human hands. —*PTI*

Octogenarian dies in fire at his house in City

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

An 80-year-old man, Mailarappa, was burnt to death after a fire at his residence in Mylasandra in the City, early Thursday, police said. Mailarappa lived alone near Thimmarayappa Circle in the City, with his granddaughter Ramya stating he had developed gangrene in his leg and had undergone amputation, leaving him immobile. Ramya used to care for him, bringing food and medication. On February 18, she visited in the evening, provided medication, and then returned home. At around 2.20am, a relative raised the alarm about the fire. Family and neighbours extinguished the flames, but the police confirmed that Mailarappa died from burn injuries. A case of unnatural death has been registered, and investigations continue into the cause of the fire and potential foul play. —*PTI*

—*ANI*

5 Kumki elephants sent to capture rogue tusker

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 19 FEB

The Forest Department has deployed a five-member team of trained kumki elephants to capture a rogue elephant in Chikkamagaluru after it trampled a coffee plantation worker on 15 February. The kumki elephants were brought in from the Sakrebailu Elephant Camp in Shivamogga on Thursday and reached Pur village near Hunasehalli in Chikkamagaluru taluk. The government has also said that radio collars must be placed on wild elephants to monitor their movements. Villages in and around Hunasehalli have witnessed frequent elephant movement in recent weeks, with residents and farmers expressing fear over venturing into their plantations.

—*SALAR NEWS*

2 get 20 years for separate POCSO cases in Kolar

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 19 FEB

A Special Fast Track Court dealing with POCSO cases sentenced two men to 20 years' imprisonment in separate incidents. Judge Prasad KN awarded 20 years and a Rs 30,000 fine to 26-year-old Balakrishna alias Balu of Mulbagal for kidnapping and raping a minor in May 2024. The court ordered Rs 4 lakh compensation. In another case, 21-year-old Sandeep alias Raghunath was given 20 years and fined Rs 30,000 for an August 2024 offence, with Rs 5 lakh compensation awarded.

—*SALAR NEWS*

KSRTC STRIKES

-Members of Joint Action Committee of the Transport Corporations protest for KSRTC employees at Freedom Park, in Bengaluru on Thursday, seeking salary revision —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

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CT/MRI scans shut in district hospitals

Provider says govt hasn't paid Rs 143 cr in 3yrs

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

CT and MRI services were halted in several district hospitals on 18 February after the government allegedly repeatedly failed to pay the service provider.

Karnataka's health system is crumbling, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka alleged on Thursday, as people protested at the Kolar district hospital.

Family members in Kolar said they were made to run from pillar to post for three days.

A similar situation occurred at the Yadgir district hospital as well.

A woman at the Kolar district hospital, who took part in the protest, told reporters that her husband was suffering from severe swelling on his face and authorities were refusing the scan.

"Today, they are demanding Rs 4,000 for a scan. Where should poor people go? Are they meant to die without treatment?" she asked.

Ashoka shared on his X handle a letter written by Krsnaa Diagnostics Limited to the National Health Mission, Karnataka, seeking the release of pending dues and warning of temporary suspension of CT and MRI services from 18 February in case of non-payment.

Kolar district hospital—*MBBS COUNCIL*

In its letter dated 15 February to the Mission Director, National Health Mission, Karnataka, the Pune-based diagnostics firm said that despite repeated communications over five years and 95 written representations in the last three years, its "rightful dues amounting to approximately Rs 143.78 crores" remained unpaid.

"Due to the non-release of our rightful dues, the situation has now reached a point where the company's financial capacity to continue operations has been entirely exhausted," the company said.

It had sought an interim payment of a minimum Rs 50 crore by 17 February, to stabilise its operations. "This is not a decision of choice, it is a decision forced upon us by continued inaction and non-payment."

First, there were reports of medicine shortages in government hospitals. Now, there were "three years of delay (in payments). This is not a minor administrative lapse. This is financial paralysis," Ashoka alleged. He slammed Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and questioned Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao's competence. —*PTI*

DKS flags voter mapping discrepancies ahead of GBA polls

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar asked the State Election Commission (SEC) to conduct "street-wise and house-wise" mapping of voters in the City ahead of the Greater Bengaluru Authority polls, citing widespread irregularities in the prepared list.

In a letter to the Chief State Election Commissioner, Shivakumar said that he had received complaints across wards and polling stations regarding large-scale systemic discrepancies which "undermine the credibility of the electoral process".

The complaints include families in the same residence being allotted to different polling stations and wards, and duplicate entry of voters – with many appearing in multiple wards, "creating an inflated voter list". A person has also been shown in two different genders.

He said that there was arbitrary deletions of long-time voters. Many were deleted without prior notice or verification, he stated.

There has been a mass transfer of voters across wards, he said: "Entire families belonging to Ward 110 have been wrongly shifted to Ward 109, even though their addresses clearly remain within Ward 110."

He added that Aadhaar cards have been displayed instead of voter's photographs and that there entire roads or houses were missing from the list.

In order to combat these issues, he stated that the Commission should constitute comprehensive streetwise and house-wise mapping exercise, whereby: Every street be mapped to the correct polling station, every street be mapped to a house and every voter to be mapped to house. "Such a Street- House-Voter mapping will ensure accuracy, prevent duplication, and eliminate arbitrary shifting or deletion of voters," Shivakumar wrote. He urged the SEC to take up the exercise on priority and carry out a special verification drive so that "no eligible voter is denied their constitutional right to vote".

—*Salar News*

Families split

DKS said families residing in the same house were split into different polling stations and even different wards

Aadhaar used, not voter pics

DKS said Aadhaar cards were displayed instead of the voter's photos, which was "careless" and a violation of the code of conduct.

'Roads, houses missing'

DKS said that entire roads and houses were missing. For example, voters of 12th Cross, Part 13, Ward 110 and voters of 6th Cross, Anjaneya Temple Road, Ittamadu, Padmanabhanagar constituency have been totally excluded from the electoral rolls, he said.

Garbage collection resumes as Bellahalli protests end

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Garbage collection resumed in parts of Bengaluru on Thursday as Bellahalli residents ended their protests over promises which they said were unfulfilled for nearly two years.

Residents of Bellahalli and Mittaganahalli, home to nearly 600 families, had blocked garbage trucks from entering the 30-acre Bellahalli landfill for two days, which receives around 1,500 tonnes of waste daily from Bengaluru. The State government on Wednesday announced a massive Rs 550 crore package to cleanup the area amid a massive political slugfest.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar had threatened to dump waste in front of BJP MLA's homes as the Opposition claimed that Congress had not allocated enough funds for waste management.

Congress MLA PM Narendraswamy on Thursday backed Shivakumar's statement, clarifying that waste management in Bengaluru is not an individual decision but a collective responsibility under the Greater Bengaluru Development Authority(GBA).

"Where we are to dump? It is not anybody's individual decision to clean Bengaluru. That is the decision of the GBA. If the non-cooperation of the MLA happens, we know how to tackle it," he said.

BJP MLA Mahesh Tenginkai said Shivakumar should focus on resolving issues instead of blaming the BJP.

"This has also happened before during the BJP's tenure, but we did not throw garbage in front of Congress' MLA or its party office," he stated. —*Agencies*

No guidelines released, no tiger safaris

MYSURU, 19 FEB

Even though the State permitted limited safari activities from Thursday in Bandipur and Nagarahole Tiger Reserves, none took place as the government didn't release the guidelines.

"We are yet to receive official communication from the State government on resuming the safari services," a source in the Forest Department said.

Safari operations have been suspended since 7 November after a slew of human-wildlife conflicts last year on the forest fringes.

The closure had prompted protests from residents, including farmers and tourism workers in areas bordering Nagarahole, who said their livelihoods had been severely affected by the safari shutdown.

Under the new plan, the State had permitted safari operations to run for shorter durations and with fewer vehicles.

Farmers protested at the Aranya Bhavan, Mysuru, and at Melukamanahalli Gate at the edge of Bandipur Tiger Reserve on Thursday —*SALAR*

In Bandipur, safaris were permitted to run for five hours a day, down from the previous eight, while it was reduced to six hours at Sunkadakatte and four hours at Nagarahole.

FARMERS PROTEST OPENING

Meanwhile, farmers protested in front of Aranya Bhavan, Mysuru, and at Melukamanahalli Gate at the edge of Bandipur Tiger Reserve, urging the administration not to relaunch the safari.

The demonstrators, under the banner of the Karnataka Sugarcane Growers Association led by Hallikerehundi Bhagyaraj on Thursday said that the decision to restart safaris would adversely impact the farming community that lived near the edge of forest lands, as they were the most affected by human-animal conflict.

They accused the government of giving into pressure from resort owners.

The protesters claimed that human-animal conflicts had reduced since the safaris were closed.

The safaris, meant for rich tourists, endanger the lives of poor people living at the edge of the forest, they said, while chanting slogans against the Congress government. —*Salar News*

BJP leaders R Ashoka, Radha Mohan Das Agarwal, BS Yediyurappa, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, BY Vijayendra, Pralhad Joshi and V Somanna at the party's State executive meeting in Bengaluru on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

BJP vows to fight corruption, farmers' woes in executive meet

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

BJP passed four resolutions at its State executive committee meeting at the Palace Grounds in Bengaluru on Thursday, which was attended by at least 1,000 functionaries. The resolutions included rampant corruption in the State, misuse of government funds, growing drug menace, agrarian problem and the garbage crisis in the City.

BJP leaders launched a sharp attack on the Congress and exuded confidence that the party would come power in the 2028 Assembly polls.

Inaugurating the meeting, Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said, "This is not merely an organisational meeting but a meeting for introspection."

BJP State President BY Vijayendra alleged there was "zero development" in Karnataka and claimed discontent within the ruling party.

"Let us work day and night to restore the BJP's past glory in Karnataka," Vijayendra said. "Even MLAs of the ruling party may revolt against the government."

Vijayendra urged party workers to gear up for a series of upcoming elections, including local body polls, GBA elections and Assembly bypolls, and called for grassroots mobilisation to highlight the failures of the Congress government.

His father and former chief minister BS Yediyurappa was felicitated for completing 50 years in active politics. rrupt Congress government". —*PTI*

People steal mud from KGF in quest for gold

KOLAR GOLD FIELDS, 19 FEB

More than 25 years after the closure of Bharath Gold Mines Limited, people in KGF are still attempting to extract traces of gold from restricted mining areas as prices of the metal have skyrocketted. As entry into the abandoned shafts is prohibited, miscreants have been sneaking in to steal gold ore-mixed mud in the hope of recovering small quantities of the yellow metal.

The Oorgaum Police Station recently arrested 16 persons in two separate incidents.

In the first case on 6 February, security personnel Thygavelu noticed eight individuals inside the Griffort's Shaft after they allegedly cut open fencing and filled gunny bags with mud. Police rushed to the spot and detained them.

In another incident on 10 February, security guard Shankar caught another group of eight attempting similar theft, and they too were arrested.

Circle Inspector Markondayya said the accused confessed they planned to process the mud chemically to extract minute quantities of gold and sell it to local jewellers. During peak mining operations, a tonne of ore yielded three to four grams of gold, and residual deposits may still remain. Advocate Velatudham of Robertsonpet said soaring gold prices continue to tempt people, even if the yield is only a few milligrams after processing dozens of bags.

—*Salar News*

MLC SEEKS NEW JAYADEVA HOSPITAL IN BENGALURU

BENGALURU 19 FEB

Congress MLC Dinesh Gooligowda has written to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar, placing a series of demands ahead of the State Budget.

He urged allocation of funds to establish a new unit of Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research on 20 acres in Kempegowda Layout on Bengaluru's outskirts. He also sought a new production centre for Mysore Silk sarees, pointing out that demand is around 5,000 sarees per day against current production of 400–500.

The MLC proposed setting up a Water Commission to comprehensively study and manage water resources in the agrarian State. He requested a hike in milk incentives from Rs 5 to Rs 7 per litre.

Citing Rs 54,000 crore annual transfers under the five guarantee schemes, he suggested a dedicated ministry. He also urged the sought better loan schemes for farmers.

—*Salar News*

FILES MISSING PLAINT

Vijayapura man kills wife, buries her at home

VIJAYAPURA, 19 FEB:

A man has been arrested by the Devar Hipparagi police in Vijayapura district for allegedly murdering his wife and burying her in his compound, and later filing a missing complaint, police said.

Vijayapura SP Lakshman Nimbaragi said the accused, after murdering his wife by attacking her on the head with a wooden object, dug a pit and buried the body.

Later, he filed a false complaint stating that his wife was missing.

"The police's suspicion proved true. He tried to mislead the investigators," SP Nimbaragi said.

The accused Prabhu Ratnakar, 46, is a civil contractor. The dead wife, Sarojini Prabhu Ratnakar, 44, was a resident of Devar Hipparagi.

Police said the crime came to light 24 days after the murder. Preliminary investigation revealed that the couple frequently quarrelled over money.

Prabhu had substantial debts and had issued cheques in his wife's name to creditors.

A cheque bounce case had been registered against Sarojini in the Yadgir district court.

Police said she had been pressuring her husband to repay the loans leading to disputes.

On 24 January night, an argument between the couple escalated.

In a fit of rage, Prabhu struck Sarojini on the head with a stick used for crushing spices and she died. The accused then dug a pit and buried the body.

On 2 February, Prabhu approached the Devar Hipparagi police and lodged a complaint stating that his wife had gone to a grocery store and had not returned.

Later, Prabhu confessed his crime.

Police exhumed the body, conducted autopsy, and arrested Prabhu for murder.

—*Salar News*

Man attacks pregnant sister with axe at wedding

KOPPAL, 19 FEB

An attempted case of honour killing has been reported from Handral village in Koppal taluk. A man allegedly tried to murder his sister for marrying a man from another caste. Fortunately, the four-month pregnant woman escaped, police said.

Koppal DSP Dr. Ram L. Arasiddi told Salar News, "Uday Kumar and Meenakshi had a civil marriage one-and-a-half years ago. On Tuesday, they came from Bengaluru to his village, Handral, for the wedding of Meenakshi's brother-in-law Venkatesh."

A mass wedding had been organised in Handral on Wednesday, and Venkatesh too was getting married.

At around 5 pm on Wednesday, Meenakshi's brother Manjunath attacked her with an axe.

"The woman was injured seriously on her head and shoulder. She was admitted to the Koppal District Hospital and is recovering. The accused has been arrested," said the DSP, Dr. Ram L. Arasiddi. The accused, Manjunath, 30, is a sheep herder.Police Meenakshi, 23, had fallen in love and had married an ST (Valmiki) man. "After receiving information about the incident, we rushed to the spot and arrested Manjunath," the DSP said. —*Salar News*

Delhi gets 25 Atal Canteens for urban poor

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

The Delhi Government has inaugurated 25 Atal Canteens across the capital to provide affordable, nutritious meals to the urban poor and daily wage earners.

Launching the scheme at Krishna Nagar, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said no resident should go to bed hungry.

Each canteen will serve around 1,000 meals a day, benefiting over one lakh people daily. The project, implemented by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, has been allocated Rs 104 crore.

The scheme was launched on 15 December, 2025, marking the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Similar subsidised canteens like the Amma Canteens and Indira Canteens were first launched in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka respectively. —*PTI*

Shots fired at editor of Manipur newspaper

IMPHAL, 19 FEB

Shots were allegedly fired at the editor of a local newspaper in Manipur's Imphal East district, police said on Thursday. Armed men intercepted Khoirom Loyalakpa's car near Hatta Cemetery at around 10pm on Wednesday. Two rounds were fired at the vehicle, shattering the rear windscreen, officers said. The assailants then reportedly pulled him from the car and physically assaulted him before fleeing the scene.

Loyalakpa was taken to hospital with a bleeding nose and was discharged after receiving primary treatment, police confirmed. A case has been registered and an investigation on.—*PTI*

—*ANI*

Ajit Pawar's plane crash: Son seeks detailed probe

PUNE, 19 FEB

Ajit Pawar's younger son Jay Pawar has demanded a thorough probe into the "serious lapses" behind the air crash that claimed his father's life, He stressed that an aircraft's black box cannot get destroyed easily. He also sought a ban on VSR Ventures Private Limited, the aviation company that operated the ill-fated Learjet 45XR plane which crashed near the Baramati airstrip in Pune district, killing Ajit and four others on 28 January. Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar and leaders from the NCP met Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and demanded a CBI probe into the plane crash. The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau said that special support has been sought for the retrieval of data from the plane's cockpit voice recorder. —*PTI*

3 injured at Shivneri Fort on Shivaji Jayanti

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

Three people were injured amid a huge rush at Shivneri Fort, the birthplace of king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Junnar in Maharashtra's Pune district on Thursday. The police said that there was no stampede, as thousands had gathered to celebrate the 396th birth anniversary of Shivaji Maharaj. A group of about 15 to 20 persons came with a 'jyoti' (firelight) and while they were descending in a hurry near Meena Darwaja of the Shivneri Fort, the police officers asked them to slow down. However, one of them slipped and fell. Later a few more at the spot fell on the stairs. Three of them sustained injuries and were treated. The situation remained normal, police officials said.—*AGENCIES*

Assam Cong unveils chargesheet against BJP

Karnataka DyCM says there is anti-incumbency wave in Assam, wants change in power

GUWAHATI, 19 FEB

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday released a 20-point 'chargesheet' against the BJP-led Assam government, accusing it of indulging in corruption and instilling fear among minorities.

Several senior party leaders, including state president Gaurav Gogoi, AICC general secretary in-charge of Assam Jitendra Singh, and Karnataka Deputy CM D K Shivakumar, former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel and former Jharkhand MLA Bandhu Tirkey were in the state in an attempt at damage control after former Assam Congress president tendered his resignation recently.

Borah, who is set to join the BJP, said that when he raised the issue of his humiliation in the party with Rahul Gandhi, he was told by him that he too feels humiliated.

On Gogoi's allegation that he has taken Rs 50 crore from Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to join the BJP, Borah said that if offered the money, he would take it in front of the press.

He alleged that Gogoi had broken the Opposition alliance, which he had stitched together, as he feared that if the "Opposition came to power in the state by chance, then he may not become the chief minister".

Meanwhile, Shivakumar said that there was a strong anti-incumbency wave in Assam, and said that people in the state were looking for a change in the government.

He said that if the BJP were strong in Assam, it would not try to induct Borah.

Congress also accused the BJP of, among other issues, failing to keep its assurance of granting ST status to six indigenous communities and increasing the daily wage of tea garden workers to Rs 351 in its decade-long regime.

The Congress further claimed that the BJP government engaged in "bulldozer justice and selective evictions of the minorities".

It also accused the goverbnment of stalling the NRC project.

State BJP senior spokesperson Rupam Goswami claimed that the 'charge sheet' contains "blatant lies." —*PTI*

Assam Congress President Gaurav Gogoi, Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and party leader Debabrata Saikia during unveiling of a 'chargesheet' against the state's BJP government in Guwahati —*PTI*

Assamese will become a minority: CM

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday claimed that the Assamese community will become "almost" a minority in the 2027 Census. During the Motion of Thanks on the Governor's address in the assembly, Sarma also said that he is in politics amid a "very dark time". Sarma has earlier claimed that the population of Muslims in Assam would be almost equal to that of the Hindus by 2041 if the current growth rate continues. The 2011 Census states the Muslim population to be 1.07 crore as against 1.92 crore Hindus. In 2001, when Assam had 23 districts, Muslims were in majority in six – Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nagaon, Karimganj and Hailakandi. Nine have majority of Muslims now. —*PTI*

Cong allowed encroachment of 30L bighas of land: Himanta

GUWAHATI, 19 FEB

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday alleged that the Congress had allowed encroachment on 30 lakh bighas of forest land during its rule in the state.

He said 1.5 lakh bighas of the encroached land have been freed.

His comments come after Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi had claimed that Sarma and his family members illegally acquired 4,000 acres of land in the state, calling it a "real estate empire."

Delivering his last speech in the outgoing Assam Assembly, Sarma said the BJP government has fought against several "Congress legacies" to carry forward a transformative journey of the state.

Not a single house of tribal families has been demolished during the eviction drive, he said, adding that they have been provided with land pattas.

- His comments come after Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi claimed that Sarma and his family members illegally acquired 4,000 acres of land in Assam.

"We are fighting the Congress legacy. We are fighting their legacies on multiple fronts -- MMR, IIMR, child marriage, polygamy, corruption and many more...Today, Assam is the shining spot of the Indian economy," he added.

The Assam Assembly elections are due in a few months in the state. —*PTI*

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, DMK MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, DMDK General Secretary Premalatha Vijayakanth, Chief Minister MK Stalin, and others during a meeting at DMK headquarters in Chennai on Thursday —*PTI*

DMDK joins DMK-led alliance ahead of TN Assembly elections

CHENNAI, 19 FEB

Late actor Vijayakanth founded DMDK on Thursday joined the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance, ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections and ending weeks of political speculations.

The pact was sealed at DMK headquarters Anna Arivalayam here in the presence of Chief Minister and party President MK Stalin.

DMDK General Secretary Premathala Vijayakanth, accompanied by senior party functionaries, including treasurer L K Sudheesh, called on Stalin to formalise the partnership.

In a social media post, Stalin said, "It brings me immense joy that the DMDK, founded by Captain Vijaykanth and a man who had unwavering love for Kalaignar (DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi), has joined the secular progressive alliance." The DMDK founder is fondly addressed as 'Captain.'

"I warmly welcome sister Premalatha Vijayakanth, who is now skillfully leading the party founded by Captain, along with their party supporters. Let this bond of goodwill continue to contribute to the progress and prosperity of Tamil Nadu," he said, sharing images of the DMDK leaders joining the DMK-led alliance.

He emphasised the objective of ensuring the continuation of the 'Dravidian model' of governance.

Later, addressing reporters at the DMDK party office, Premalatha said, "With the blessings of both the Captain (Vijayakanth) and Kalaignar, we have forged an alliance with the DMK."

"A seat-sharing committee will be formed soon," she added.

In 2021 assembly polls, DMDK partnered with the TTV Dhinakaran's Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam and in 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the party was part of the AIADMK-led alliance. —*PTI*

SC rejects plea for SIR of voter rolls in Assam

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a PIL seeking directions to the Election Commission (EC) to conduct a special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in poll-bound Assam.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi took note of the submissions of the poll panel that the final electoral rolls have already been prepared in Assam and the petition has become infructuous.

The PIL, filed by Mrinal Kumar Choudhary, challenged the EC's decision to conduct a standard Special Revision in Assam instead of the more rigorous SIR conducted in other states.

However, senior advocate DS Naidu, representing the poll panel, informed the bench that the final electoral roll for Assam had already been published on 10 February.

The PIL sought a direction to quash the poll panel's memo dated 17 November, 2025, which ordered a Special Revision instead of an SIR in Assam. —*PTI*

Man threatens to kill Rahul, 25 Oppn MPs

JAIPUR, 19 FEB

Congress leader and Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi received a death threat from a man who allegedly posted a video threatening to shoot him and 25 other Opposition MPs. The suspect, Raj Singh, who identified himself as spokesperson of the Right-wing group Karni Sena, was detained by police in Kota, Rajasthan on Thursday, a senior official said.

In the video, Singh claimed that BJP and Karni Sena workers were angered by the verbal abuse of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla by 25 Congress MPs during the recent Budget session. Rahul was barred from citing former Army Chief Gen. MM Naravane regarding the 2020 India-China standoff, which led to an impasse in Parliament.

"If such an incident occurs again, we will enter the homes of those MPs and shoot them," Singh warned, adding that MPs should be arrested within 24 hours or they would be shot one by one. A picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Birla shaking hands was visible in the video.

Both the BJP and Karni Sena denied having any link with Singh.

In August 2025, Rahul's lawyer filed a plea in a Pune court alleging a threat to Gandhi's life from followers of VD Savarkar.

The plea was promptly withdrawn after Pawar stated it had been submitted without the consent Gandhi. —*PTI*

West Bengal BJP MLA Bishnu Prasad Sharma joins TMC

KOLKATA, 19 FEB

Rebel BJP MLA Bishnu Prasad Sharma joined the ruling TMC in West Bengal on Thursday ahead of the assembly elections.

Sharma, a first-time MLA from Kurseong, joined the party at its headquarters in Kolkata, signalling a churn in the Darjeeling Hills before the assembly poll.

He was welcomed to the TMC by Education Minister Bratya Basu and Industry Minister Shashi Panja

Sharma said he would work for Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's "development model".

Sharma had repeatedly voiced support for the demand for a separate Gorkhaland state, arguing that the Hills require focused administrative attention and development.

He had also at times raised the pitch for a separate North Bengal state, insisting that regional aspirations were not being addressed adequately.

He contested the 2024 Lok Sabha polls as an Independent from the Darjeeling seat, projecting himself as the "son-of-the-soil". The bid, however, failed to gain traction, with the BJP's Raju Bista retaining the seat.

BJP chief whip in the assembly, Shankar Ghosh, said Sharma had no support base in his constituency and had not been in touch with the party for a long time. —*PTI*

BJP MLA Bishnu Prasad Sharma from Kurseong Assembly Constituency joins TMC ahead of the West Bengal Assembly polls —*ANI*

MAMATA FUMES AT PM FOR USING 'SWAMI' FOR RAMAKRISHNA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi as "culturally insensitive" for addressing Ramakrishna Paramahamsa with the prefix "Swami" in a post marking the mystic's birth anniversary. Banerjee said Ramakrishna, priest of Kolkata's Dakshineswar Kali Temple, is traditionally revered as "Thakur," while his monastic disciples, like Swami Vivekananda, are called "Swami." She previously criticised Modi for calling Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay "Bankim da" in Parliament. —PTI

TO DEVELOP SOVEREIGN AI

French Prez pitches for human-centric AI future

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

India and France will jointly work to build a framework for artificial intelligence by combining innovation with responsibility and technology with humanity, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday.

Speaking at the AI Impact Summit here, Macron said France and India share a common vision for developing a "sovereign AI" to protect the planet and foster prosperity for all.

"Let's focus together on bridging rather than dividing, creating rather than destroying, sharing rather than taking. France intends to use its G7 Presidency to foster that vision," he added.

Macron said France, as the current G7 chair, will work towards ensuring protection of children against AI and digital abuse. It plans to ban social networks for children aged under 15 years. India will join such an approach in order to protect children and teenagers

Describing India as a major player in the artificial intelligence (AI) domain, the French president underlined the need for rules to govern use of AI.

Macron also pitched for what he described as "targeted funding to leverage talents and creativity" in the AI domain.

The French President began his address by lauding India's journey in the digital space.

"Ten years ago, a street vendor in Mumbai could not open a bank account. And today the same vendor accepts payments on his phone, instantly," he said.

"India built a digital identity for 1.4 billion people. A payment system that now processes 20 billion transactions every month," he said.

"A health infrastructure that has issued 500 million digital health IDs. Here are the results. They call it the India Stack Open Interoperable Sovereign," he noted. —*PTI*

PM, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince praise capital flow

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on Thursday commended the significant two-way investment flows between the two countries.

They encouraged the UAE Sovereign Wealth Funds to continue to invest in the Indian economy.

Modi and the Crown Prince also acknowledged the tremendous progress achieved in bilateral relations in a wide range of sectors, including defence and security, trade and investment, education and cultural cooperation.

They acknowledged the potential of L'Imad as the newest sovereign fund to strengthen this partnership for mutual benefit.

They also discussed collaborative opportunities in strategic sectors such as space, nuclear energy, technology and innovation.

The Health Ministries of both the countries has finalised an MoU on cooperation in health and medicine.

A term sheet was finalised between the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing, and G42 and the Mohamed Bin Zayed University for deployment of supercomputer cluster in India. Office of Abu Dhabi insurance company's office will be set up in Gujarat.—*PTI*

Kerala Cong MLA K Babu quits electoral politics

KOCHI, 19 FEB

Senior Congress leader and Tripunithura MLA K Babu have announced that he will not contest the forthcoming Assembly elections, marking his exit from electoral politics.

Speaking at a press conference, Babu said his decision was based on personal reasons. He noted that although the party leadership had urged him to stand again, he informed them he would not enter the fray.

Babu has contested seven Assembly elections since 1991, winning six. He recalled that when he was first fielded from Tripunithura in 1991, the constituency was considered a CPI(M) stronghold. After losing the seat in 2016, he and his supporters worked to reclaim it, succeeding in the 2021 Assembly polls.

During the 2011–16 UDF government, Babu served as Ports Minister. He said significant steps towards the Vizhinjam International Seaport project were initiated during his tenure. —*PTI*

Bee attack kills umpire, injures Unnao cricketers

UNNAO/KANPUR, 19 FEB

A bee attack during a cricket match in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh, has left one umpire dead and at least 15 players injured, police confirmed on Thursday. Organisation officials confirmed that the incident occurred on Wednesday evening at Sapru Maidan stadium in the Shuklaganj area. Manik Gupta, 65, from Kanpur, was umpiring a cricket match when a swarm of bees suddenly attacked, causing panic as players and spectators ran for cover. Eyewitnesses said Gupta sustained injuries and fell unconscious. He was initially taken to a private hospital in Shuklaganj and later referred to Lala Lajpat Rai Hospital in Kanpur, where he was declared dead. *—PTI*

Rescue 6 Odias stuck in Thailand, says Odisha govt

UNNAO/KANPUR, 19 FEB

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Woman, 99, killed, stuffed in trunk in Punjab

HOSHIARPUR, 19 FEB

A 99-year-old woman was murdered by a robber, her body was found with head injuries, stuffed inside an iron trunk in her home on Wednesday. The victim, Joginder Kaur, had been living alone at Bham village. The murder was discovered after a milkman noticed untouched bottles outside Kaur's door. Searching the home, neighbours found her body. Police filed an FIR against a local resident, Daniel, who is absconding. Investigators believe he killed Kaur during a botched robbery. The case has been filed under Sections 103 (murder) and 331(3) (house-breaking to commit an offence) of the BNS *—PTI*

SC grants bail to Vikram Bhatt in cheating case

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

The Supreme Court on Thursday granted bail to filmmaker Vikram Bhatt in a 30 crore cheating case lodged in Rajasthan. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi also regularised the interim bail granted to Bhatt's wife, Shwetambari Bhatt. Earlier on 13 January, Rajasthan High Court rejected their bail applications. Vikram, his wife, and others were arrested for cheating and breach of trust after allegedly misappropriating funds intended for a film project.The SC, while granting bail to both, asked both parties to make efforts to arrive at an amicable solution through mediation. *—PTI*

SC shuts case against 'Ghooskhor Pandat'

Film's title & publicity material withdrawn, says producer

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

The Supreme Court disposed of a plea against the Netflix crime thriller 'Ghooskhor Pandat' on Thursday after filmmaker Neeraj Pandey informed it that he has withdrawn the title of the movie and all publicity material.

Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan disposed of the plea seeking a stay on the release of the film after taking Pandey's affidavit on record and said it is expected that there shall be a quietus to this controversy in all respects.

The plea was filed by Atul Mishra, the secretary of the Brahman Samaj of India.

In his affidavit, Pandey said that although the new title of the Manoj Bajpayee-starrer has not yet been finalised, it will not be similar to the earlier name.

During the hearing, Justice Nagarathna said, "There was

nothing wrong with the word 'Pandit', but 'Pandit' with 'Ghooskhor'. We have a problem with the second word, not the first word."

The affidavit said that the new title shall accurately reflect the narrative of the film without giving rise to unintended interpretations.

The court rapped Pandey on 12 February over the title of his movie, observing that a section of society cannot be denigrated in the name of freedom of expression.

- The Supreme Court disposed of a plea against the Netflix crime thriller 'Ghooskhor Pandat' on Thursday after filmmaker Neeraj Pandey informed it that he has withdrawn the title of the movie and all its publicity material

The plea alleged that the movie title and storyline were prima facie offensive and derogatory, which portray the Brahmin community in a defamatory manner.

The PIL objected to the use of the word "Pandat", a caste and religion-identifying title, alongside "Ghooskhor," which denotes bribery and moral corruption. *– PTI*

POLARISING FILMS

Here is a look at films that have landed in hot water over allegations of polarisation

'YADAV JI KI LOVE STORY'

Releasing on **27 February**, the film is already facing protests in Uttar Pradesh with members of the Yadav community alleging that the film promotes a "love jihad" narrative.

'SHATAK'

Released on **20 February**, this historical drama traces RSS' 100-year journey. Critics call it a "propaganda film" aimed at glorifying a polarising organisation.

'DHURANDAR 2'

The trailer of Ranveer Singh's 'Dhurandar 2', **released on 3 February**, sparked a controversy over its political overtones. His character declares, "Yeh naya Hindustan hai, yeh ghar mein ghus kar bhi marega" (This is the new India; it will enter your home and it will kill you). The line echoes Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2019 remark following the Pulwama attack, and the government stance thereafter.

'Kerala Story 2' purveys hate, says Kerala CM Vijayan

T'PURAM, 19 FEB

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan termed 'The Kerala Story 2' as a "hate-mongering film" on Thursday and said the release should be seen with "utmost gravity."

In a post on X, Vijayan said, that having seen through the alleged communal agenda and blatant lies in the first part, "Kerala will reject this attempt to demonise our secular fabric."

"It is shocking how fabricated narratives aimed at inciting communal discord receive a free pass, while critical expressions of art get gagged. We must stand united against these attempts to paint our land as a hub of terror," he said on X.

BJP leader Sobha Surendran said that although she has not seen the movie, the title of a film cannot be questioned as "we cannot violate freedom of expression."

She also said that there are many films which criticise the RSS and the BJP, but "we respect their freedom of expression."

Vijayan had expressed concern over the upcoming release of the second part of 'The Kerala Story', claiming that its first instalment was made "to spread hatred against the state."

Congress General Secretary KC Venugopal claimed on Thursday that the movie 'Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond' aims to "insult and communally divide" Kerala by "inventing false stories" about people being forced to eat beef in the state. *—PTI*

ROW OVER MONEY

Bangladesh bars SpiceJet from its airspace over dues

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

- Bangladesh has barred SpiceJet from using its airspace as the budget carrier has not paid its dues, according to sources.

Bangladesh has barred SpiceJet from using its airspace as the budget carrier has not paid its dues, according to sources.

With the Bangladesh airspace not being available, the airline is taking longer routes for some of its flights from Kolkata.

A SpiceJet spokesperson on Thursday said the airline is holding talks with the authorities on operational and procedural matters, including navigation-related charges.

"These are routine industry issues and we are working constructively towards an early resolution. Our flight operations remain unaffected," the spokesperson said in a statement.

While details were not disclosed, the sources said Bangladesh has banned the airline from using its airspace due to non-payment of dues.

Meanwhile, airlines faced issues in checking in passengers at airports on Thursday morning due to a software problem that lasted for more than 40 minutes, according to sources.

Sources told PTI that IndiGo, Air India Express, SpiceJet and Akasa Air were impacted at Delhi, Mumbai and other airports.

According to sources, check-in systems were impacted from around 6:45 am to 7:28 am due to a glitch in Navitaire, a widely used airline technology software provider.

The system helps airlines manage bookings, reservations, check-in services, and departure control operations. When such systems go offline, airlines are unable to process passengers efficiently, resulting in temporary slowdowns.

The disruption, which lasted for over 40 minutes, affected passenger processing at counters and kiosks, leading to some delays. The glitch in the check-in systems was set right later and normal operations resumed. — PTI

Anil Ambani: Won't go abroad without SC nod

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani has filed an undertaking in the Supreme Court that he will not leave the country without its prior permission and will cooperate with the probe into the alleged Rs 40,000 crore fraud involving the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (ADAG).

The industrialist stated that he was not a flight risk and has no intention to evade the law.

The submissions have been in response to a plea filed by former bureaucrat EAS Sarma seeking a fair probe into the alleged massive banking fraud involving the ADAG, Anil Ambani and group companies.

The affidavit stated that he has been summoned by the Directorate of Enforcement to appear on 26 February 2026, and has undertook to appear on the date.

Voicing displeasure over the "unexplained delay" in investigations, the court on 4 February had directed the CBI and the ED to conduct a fair probe into the alleged fraud.

When Sarma said that he may flee, Ambani, represented by advocate Mukul Rohatgi, assured that he will not leave the country without SC nod.

Anil's wife, former actor Tina Ambani, has also sought adjournment twice and has not deposed before the ED on her scheduled dates of 10 and 17 February. *—PTI*

MP villagers attack quarry survey team

DHAR, 19 FEB

Tensions flared up in a village in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district when villagers allegedly attacked an administrative team that had arrived to conduct drilling and survey work for a proposed limestone quarry.

The tehsildar's vehicle and several government vehicles were damaged by stones, and videos circulating on social media show an enraged mob attempting to overturn the tehsildar's car. Officials had reached the village with police and was conducting sampling and survey for a limestone quarry and cement plant project. As soon as the drilling machinery was parked, a large number of villagers, including women, gathered at the site and staged a protest.

Despite heavy police deployment, the situation quickly went out of control. *—PTI*

Major chinks in TDB's Sabarimala offering system: HC

KOCHI, 19 FEB

The Kerala High Court has observed that there are "deep-rooted systemic deficiencies" in the procedure, supervision, stock accounting, and financial control in the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) regarding offerings at the Sabarimala temple.

It said that the time has come for the TDB to put in place a comprehensive, transparent, and accountable framework, to ensure that the legitimate income of the Board is duly safeguarded and "not allowed to be drained away through leakage, pilferage, or mismanagement."

A bench of justices Raja Vijayaraghavan V and K V Jayakumar made the observations after perusing the report of the VACB SIT probing the alleged misappropriation of funds by TDB employees regarding the sale of 'Adiya Sishtam Ghee,' a sacred offering sold to devotees at the Lord Ayyappa shrine.

The SIT told the bench that it has registered a case under the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita against 33 people, which include temple special

2 MINORS INVOLVED

16-year-old girl sexually assaulted by trio in Hyd

HYDERABAD, 19 FEB

A 16-year-old girl was allegedly sexually assaulted by three individuals, including two minors, after being threatened with a knife in Chengicherla on the night of 16 February, police said on Thursday. The girl's mother filed a complaint at Narsingi police station on 17 February after her daughter went missing that day. She was later traced and rescued from Chengicherla on 18 February, police added.

One of the accused, who has a history of involvement in eight cases, including robbery and theft, was apprehended on 18 February along with a minor boy, who reportedly lured the victim. The third suspect, another minor, remains at large, and efforts are underway to arrest him.

The girl had earlier gone shopping in Charminar on 7 February and met a 16-year-old boy. They maintained contact over the phone, and she met him again on 16 February. That same night, the boy and his two friends—one of whom is a minor—took her in an auto-rickshaw to a house in Chengicherla. Police said they threatened her with a knife, forced alcohol upon her, and then assaulted her sexually.

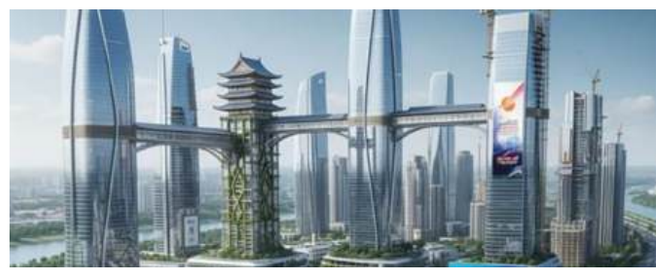
In another incident in Banda, UP, a Dalit girl, 15, was abducted and gang-raped by two youths and a minor at a hotel. The accused, identified as Mahesh Kushwaha, 18, Shakti Singh, 19, and a 15-year-old boy, were arrested. The girl was later abandoned under a bridge. The incident occurred at around 8.30pm on Tuesday; the accused were detained after a case was registered. *—PTI*

Japan, Singapore cities likely in UP

LUCKNOW, 19 FEB

The Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) has sent a proposal to the state government for the development of Japan City and Singapore City along the Yamuna Expressway (YE), officials said on Thursday.

In a statement, YEIDA CEO RK Singh said the proposal, dispatched on 18 February informed the state's Infrastructure and Industrial Development Commissioner that land for the two proposed projects has been identified within the authority's jurisdiction.



He said the authority has also prepared the land acquisition plan for both projects.

Singh noted that the information was sought in the context of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's proposed official visit to Japan and Singapore, following which the authority was asked to earmark suitable land for Japan City and Singapore City.

According to the proposal, Sector 5A and Sector 7 in Greater Noida have been identified for the projects. *—PTI*

END OF NAXALISM SOON

Top Maoist surrenders, Bihar 'naxal-free': Cops

PATNA, 19 FEB

The Bihar Police claimed that the state has become 'Naxal-free' with the surrender of a top Maoist, Suresh Koda alias Mustakim, who carried a bounty of Rs 3 lakh on his head.

According to a statement issued by the Police Headquarters, Koda, who was named in at least 60 cases, many of which were lodged under the stringent UAPA, surrendered before the Special Task Force (STF) in Munger district on Wednesday.

Koda gave himself up along with three assault rifles, hundreds of ammunition and

magazines, besides some cash.

According to the police, steps were being taken to provide benefits under 'Atmasmarpan Sah Punarvaas Yojana', a scheme for the rehabilitation of surrendered insurgents.

Under the scheme, Koda will get Rs 3 lakh, equivalent to the reward he carried on his head, besides an incentive of Rs 5 lakh and a monthly stipend of Rs 10,000 for vocational training for 36 months.

"With the surrender of Koda, the Naxal network has been obliterated in Bihar, and the entire state has become Naxal-free," said the statement.

Meanwhile, CRPF Director General GP Singh on Thursday said the naxal menace will be eradicated from the country by March as announced by Home Minister Amit Shah.

Addressing the DG's Parade of the force in Guwahati, he said decisive steps have been taken by the CRPF in joint operations with other security agencies against Naxalites last year.

Singh said CRPF personnel are doing commendable work in Manipur. *—PTI*

Naxal-affected districts down to just seven

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

A fresh review of the regions affected by left wing extremism (LWE) has brought down the number of affected districts in the country to seven from eight, a development that aligns with the Centre's declaration on ending the Naxal menace by March 2026.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has recently issued the new categorisation to all Naxal-affected states with effect from 9 February, officials told PTI.

A comprehensive review of the "National Policy and Action Plan to Address LWE" was undertaken recently by the Centre, analysing 38 districts in Jharkhand, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana and West Bengal.

The last such review was held in December 2025.

The national action plan regulates resources allocated to these states and districts under two broad heads of the Security-Related Expenditure category. *—PTI*

AI Summit: Messy mgmt mars India's proud moment

Long queues and overcrowding were reported at Bharat Mandapam, which is hosting the AI summit —*PTI*

What was meant to be a proud moment for India's technology ambitions, AI Impact Summit 2026 descended into chaos from day one. World's biggest tech brains, who were also the keynote speakers, waited in queues for hours; visitors were forced to walk for kilometres to find transport; wifi failed to work in parts of the AI event venue.

The India AI Impact Summit 2026, held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, was designed to showcase India's growing prominence in artificial intelligence. Featuring more than 3,250 speakers and over 500 sessions between 16 and 20 February, it brought together founders, policymakers, researchers and global technology leaders.

But on its opening days, the spotlight shifted from cutting-edge innovation to poor management and crowd control failures. The event witnessed a national embarrassment too when one Galgotias University presented a Chinese robodog as 'Made in India'.

On Wednesday evening, several attendees said they were left stranded as roads were closed for VVIP movement, and access to the nearest metro station was shut. With vehicles barred from entering and no shuttle services in place, delegates, including international visitors, walked to find cabs.

Heavy traffic congestion was reported across key routes in Delhi. Restrictions for VIP movement led to long traffic jams.

Caleb Friesen, a Canadian national who has lived in India for the past eight years, shared his experience on X: "Had such a great day at the India AI Impact Summit. But the way it ended was a huge let-down. No cabs, no pre-arranged shuttle. 'Road is closed, go for a walk.'

B'luru-based AI startup NeoSapien's CEO alleged that his company's AI wearables were stolen —*SCREENGRAB*

Imagine how international visitors must have felt. Not to mention differently-abled folks."

Inside the venue, attendees described long queues and repeated security checks, even for prominent speakers. Yann LeCun, Meta's Chief AI scientist and one of the most influential figures in modern AI research, was reportedly stuck in line and made to undergo multiple layers of security despite being scheduled to address the summit. LeCun has recently been in global headlines over plans to leave Meta and start a new AI research company.

Entrepreneurs and start-up founders expressed particular frustration that those building India's AI ecosystem appeared to be sidelined at an event meant to celebrate them.

Dhananjay Yadav, chief executive of NeoSapien, alleged that his company's AI wearables were stolen after security personnel asked him to vacate his booth ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit.

"At 12 noon, security personnel arrived to sanitise and cordon off the area ahead of the PM's visit at 2pm," he wrote. "I explained that we're building India's first patented AI wearable and requested a chance to showcase it."

Yadav said that after being instructed to leave, and reassured that security would look after items left behind, he and his team later discovered their wearables were missing.

"We paid for flights, accommodation, logistics and even the booth. Only to see our wearables disappear inside a high-security zone," he wrote, questioning how such a loss could occur if only security personnel and official entourages had access.

Other exhibitors reported being locked out of their stalls during security sweeps. Maitreya Wagh, co-founder of voice AI start-up Bolna, said he was unable to access his company's booth after gates were closed. Punit Jain, founder of Reskill, described "7am queues" followed by hours of waiting and a "full evacuation" before the prime minister's arrival.

"An AI Summit that sidelines its own builders?" Jain wrote on X. "Exhibitors, delegates, start-up founders left outside. No water. No clarity. Media shows celebration. Ground reality was chaos."

"Day 1 had some operational challenges, but coordination and access management improved significantly thereafter. Large-scale, high-security events are complex, what matters is responsiveness and execution," he said.

Several attendees complained of overcrowded halls, with doors shut once sessions reached capacity. "You have to be there well in advance," one participant said. "You can't float between sessions like at other conferences."

Soumya Sharma, founder of healthcare-focused Livo AI, said some discussions were held behind closed doors and that sessions were shut due to overcrowding, preventing many delegates from participating. Further controversy arose over reports of a temporary "laptop ban" during parts of the summit. Attendees and exhibitors alleged that security personnel prohibited laptops, cameras, car keys, bags and even water bottles from being brought into certain areas, restrictions critics described as "oxymoronic" for a technology-focused event.

By Monday afternoon, social media was flooded with complaints from founders, exhibitors and delegates who said last-minute closures and security sweeps left them stranded outside exhibition halls.

The poor organisation of the event was acknowledged in a press conference on Tuesday by Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who said "a war-room" had been set up at the summit to address any issues reported to them. "About 70,000 people have attended the summit and we can say the organisation is very slow," he said. "Whatever feedback you have, please share with us. We are working very hard to make this experience enjoyable for everyone," he added. —*Salar News*

Heavy traffic congestion was reported across key routes in Delhi—*PTI*

Administrative Imbalance

The world's biggest AI summit was marred by chaos. Here are the key complaints:

- Keynote speakers such as Yann LeCun, chief AI scientist at Meta (pic above)were reportedly stuck in queues even it was time for his speech.
- Visitors and delegates were forced to wait in long queues for 1 to 3 hours, with multiple security checks increasing waiting times.
- There was no Wi-Fi connectivity and poor mobile network coverage in several areas.

- Food stalls accepted cash payments only.
- Before PM Narendra Modi's visit to Bharat Mandapam, exhibitors were told to vacate halls for security reasons without any guidance where to go next.
- Items were reportedly stolen during the security check process and wearable tech were stolen from stalls.
- Visitors were forced to sit on the floor due to lack of seating.
- Traffic chaos around the venue added to the mess. People also had a tough time finding a ride in the evening

SALAR

Gaza war death toll far higher than reported: Lancet

More than 75,000 people were killed in the first 16 months of the war in Gaza, at least 25,000 more than the death toll announced by local authorities at the time, according to a study published on Wednesday in The Lancet medical journal.

The research, covering the period from 7 October, 2023, when Hamas launched its surprise attack on Israel, to 5 January 2025, suggests the human cost of the conflict has been substantially underestimated. It also found that the Gaza Health Ministry's reporting on the proportion of women, children and elderly people among those killed was accurate.

According to the study, 42,200 women, children and elderly people died during the period examined, accounting for 56 per cent of all violent deaths in Gaza. The findings challenge claims that local casualty data has been exaggerated or manipulated.

By 19 June 2024, the Gaza Health Ministry had reported 37,396 deaths since the outbreak of hostilities, figures cited by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Although Israeli authorities have publicly questioned the ministry's statistics, the numbers have been accepted as broadly accurate by Israeli intelligence services, the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Independent analyses have also lent support. One study compared changes in the number of deaths among UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff with those recorded by the ministry and found allegations of fabrication implausible.

However, the collection of data has grown increasingly difficult as the war has devastated Gaza's infrastructure. Much of the health system has been destroyed, hampering routine reporting processes. Traditionally, the ministry's figures were based on hospital records and bodies brought to medical facilities. As facilities were damaged or overwhelmed, authorities began supplementing their reporting with information from reliable media sources and first responders.

This shift, while intended to improve overall coverage, has reduced the level of detailed information available. The ministry now reports separately the number of unidentified bodies included in the total death toll. As of 10 May, 2024, 30 per cent of the 35,091 recorded deaths were unidentified. Some officials and media outlets have pointed to this as evidence of unreliability, but researchers argue the opposite may be true: the real death toll is likely higher.

The non-governmental organisation Airwars, which conducts detailed incident-by-incident assessments in conflict zones, has frequently found that not all identifiable victims are included in official lists. In addition, the United Nations estimated that by 29 February 2024, 35% of buildings in Gaza had been destroyed. With vast areas reduced to rubble, thousands of bodies are believed to remain buried. Estimates suggest more than 10,000 people could still be unaccounted for beneath collapsed structures.

Beyond the immediate fatalities caused by violence, experts warn of a second, potentially larger wave of deaths stemming from indirect consequences of the conflict.

Even if fighting were to cease immediately, mortality from reproductive complications, communicable diseases and chronic conditions is expected to rise due to the collapse of healthcare services, shortages of food and clean water, and the displacement of much of the population.

Recent conflicts suggest that indirect deaths can range from three to 15 times the number of direct deaths. Applying a conservative ratio of four indirect deaths for every direct death to the 37,396 fatalities reported by June 2024 would result in an estimated total of up to 186,000 deaths attributable to the conflict. Based on Gaza's 2022 population estimate of 2,375,259, that figure would represent approximately 7.9 per cent of the territory's population.

Earlier modelling underscored the scale of the risk. A report published on 7 February 2024, when the direct death toll stood at 28,000, projected that without a ceasefire between 58,260 and 85,750 deaths could occur by 6 August 2024, depending on whether disease outbreaks or further escalation took place.

Researchers stress that an immediate ceasefire is essential to prevent further loss of life. They call for urgent measures to enable the delivery of medical supplies, food, clean water and other basic necessities. They also emphasise the importance of documenting the scale and nature of the suffering.

Recording the true toll of the conflict is not only vital for historical accountability but also for legal reasons. In January 2024, the International Court of Justice ordered interim measures requiring Israel to take effective steps to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to alleged acts under the Genocide Convention.

At present, the Gaza Health Ministry remains the only body systematically counting the dead. Accurate data, researchers argue, will be indispensable for post-war recovery, rebuilding infrastructure and planning humanitarian assistance.

—Courtesy, The Lancet

A man walks past graves containing the bodies of unidentified Palestinians returned from Israel as part of the ceasefire deal during their burial in Deir al-Balah, Gaza Strip —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

4M children malnourished as aid cuts deepen Afghan's hunger crisis

- Afghanistan, devastated by four decades of conflict, has long depended on foreign assistance. The Taliban takeover in 2021 saw direct international aid halted almost overnight, pushing millions into poverty and hunger.

In a crowded ward at Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul, a toddler cries as an oxygen mask is secured over his face, its green elastic stretched across sunken cheeks. When he was admitted a month ago, 2½-year-old Abu Bakar was fighting for his life.

Severely malnourished, he weighed just six kilograms – about half the expected weight for his age. Doctors say he is one of the fortunate few. His family managed to get him to the capital in time for life-saving treatment. For every child like Abu Bakar who reaches hospital, many more do not.

"We have a catastrophic nutritional crisis on our hands, with two-thirds of the country in a very serious or crisis level for acute malnutrition," said John Aylieff, Afghanistan country director for the World Food Programme (WFP). "This is the highest surge in malnutrition ever recorded in the country. The lives of four million children are hanging in the balance."

Afghanistan, devastated by four decades of conflict, has long depended on foreign assistance. The Taliban takeover in 2021 saw direct international aid halted almost overnight, pushing millions into poverty and hunger. The crisis has since been compounded by a moribund economy, severe drought, two devastating earthquakes in late 2025, and the return of 5.3 million Afghans expelled mainly from neighbouring Pakistan and Iran.

Now, fresh funding cuts to humanitarian organisations have severed what remained of a vital lifeline. The halting of US aid to programmes such as WFP food distribution has forced drastic reductions.

"The aid cuts have been devastating," Aylieff said. Of the four million acutely malnourished children nationwide, "we are forced now to turn away three out of four because we simply don't have the money".

In a humanitarian career spanning more than 30 years, he added, he has never seen anything like it.

Of the 17.4 million Afghans facing acute hunger, the WFP can now reach only two million. Even those families receive reduced rations. Food parcels that once sustained entire communities have dwindled or disappeared altogether.

Donor budgets are stretched thin across multiple global emergencies, including famine in Sudan and the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. In 2024, the WFP's Afghanistan budget stood at $600m following what Aylieff described as "very generous" contributions. Last year, that figure halved. This year, the agency expects to receive about $200m – far short of what is needed to address a hunger crisis that is "spiralling out of control".

Of the 17.4 million Afghans facing acute hunger, the World Food Programme can now reach only 2 million —*UN*

Abu Bakar's family have felt the consequences directly. "We once received assistance from an organisation that helped us a lot with food," said his mother, Latifa, 36, who, like many Afghans, goes by one name. That support ended three years ago. Since then, there has been nothing.

Her husband, a construction worker, has been unemployed for a year. There are days when she has nothing to feed her five sons. Cradling her emaciated toddler, Latifa says she can endure hunger herself. "I can control my hunger. I will handle it. But my child can't."

Hunger is now driving a rise in child mortality. The WFP has recorded more than 500 child deaths in recent months – a figure Aylieff describes as "the tip of the iceberg".

Many winter deaths occur in remote villages cut off by snow and go unregistered. "How many more Afghan children will die before the world wakes up?" he asked. "Before the world says we've crossed a threshold and we are not willing to stand by any more? What is the number? I really don't know."

At Ataturk Hospital in Kabul, 21-year-old Sharara is fighting to keep her six-month-old son Samir alive. From the remote north-eastern province of Badakhshan, she travelled between hospitals there and in the northern city of Kunduz as doctors struggled to treat her baby's heart condition and severe pneumonia, compounded by malnutrition.

Eventually she reached the malnutrition ward in the capital. But after 13 days in hospital, Samir has not gained weight. "Doctors say his condition is currently critical," she said quietly.

Women are bearing a disproportionate burden of the crisis. Under sweeping restrictions imposed by the Taliban authorities, women have been barred from nearly all employment. Widows with children are particularly vulnerable, cut off from income and support.

Aid workers report growing despair. "We're getting more and more suicide calls from women because they just don't know how to feed their children and they don't know where to turn," Aylieff said.

WFP nutrition programmes have seen a 30 per cent increase in acutely malnourished pregnant and breastfeeding women – a surge unprecedented in the experience of nutrition specialists. Malnutrition among mothers not only endangers their own lives but also those of their babies, perpetuating a deadly cycle.

"These are the women to whom the world pledged unwavering solidarity after the 2021 takeover," Aylieff said. "Those same women are asking us: where is the solidarity of the international community?"

His plea is simple. "Do not walk away from Afghan women who are now facing abject misery, hunger, malnutrition and watching their children die." —*PTI*

ICE now allowed to detain lawful refugees

WASHINGTON, 19 FEB

The administration of Donald Trump has authorised US Immigration and Customs Enforcement to detain lawful refugees who fail to obtain permanent residency within a year of arrival, according to a Department of Homeland Security memo obtained by CBS News. The directive, dated 18 February, treats the one-year mark as a mandatory "re-vetting" point. Refugees who have not secured a green card must report for inspection or face arrest and detention. ICE may hold them during the review. Officials say the policy is aimed at identifying fraud, security risks or serious criminal histories. Those raising concerns could lose their status and be deported. *—Agencies*

Iran and Russia conduct joint naval drills in the Gulf of Oman; American F/A-18 Super Hornet jets land on the deck of USS Abraham Lincoln, a massive aircraft destroyer on Thursday *—PRESS TV/X @CENTCOM*

US-Iran war this weekend? Trump's nod awaited

Russia-Iran hold drills; US military in Gulf largest since Iraq

WASHINGTON/ TEHRAN, 19 FEB

The US is prepared to strike Iran this weekend, but President Donald Trump is yet to make the final decision, CNN reported.

The White House has been briefed that the military could be ready for an attack by the weekend, after a significant buildup in recent days of air and naval assets in the Middle East, a source told CNN.

The US has sent the world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford to the region. The USS Abraham Lincoln, flanked by several destroyers, has been waiting near Iran for over a fortnight. It has also begun deploying dozens of fighter jets and put its bases in the Middle East on alert, marking the most substantive deployment to the region since US invaded Iraq in 2003.

Meanwhile, Iran and Russia conducted joint drills in the Gulf of Oman. The drill on Thursday saw Iranian forces and Russian sailors conduct operations in the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean, Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported.

The drill was aimed at "upgrading operational coordination as well as exchange of military experiences," IRNA added.

China had joined the "Security Belt" drill in previous years, but there was no acknowledgment it participated now.

A vessel that appeared to be a Steregushchiy-class Russian corvette has been seen at a military port in the Iranian city of Bandar Abbas.

Iran indicated that the drills would include anti-ship missiles, but the presence of the Ford means the US is tightening its missile defences.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Marco Rubio plans to travel to Israel next week to update Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the US-Iran nuclear talks.

TRUMP THREATENS UK OVER BOMBER AIRBASE

Trump asked the UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer not to hand over the Diego Garcia bomber airbase to Mauritius, saying that the US may need it if tensions escalate with Iran over its nuclear deal

"Starmer should not lose control, for any reason, of Diego Garcia by entering a tenuous, at best, 100-year lease," Trump wrote on Truth Social. *—AGENCIES*

GEN Z PROTEST FALLOUT

Nepal youth unrest risks rebellion: Karki

KATHMANDU, 19 FEB

Nepal's interim Prime Minister Sushila Karki on Thursday warned that failing to address youth discontent could trigger another rebellion, as the country gears up for election on 5 March.

Speaking on the 76th Democracy Day celebrations at the Nepali Army Pavilion in Kathmandu, she said the Gen Z-led protests last September sought "an end to corruption, nepotism and discrimination. It sought good governance and equitable justice."

"The state must respond to this not only with generosity, but also with humility and a deep sense of duty," she added.

She warned that failing to address youth discontent could trigger another rebellion. "No nation can progress by undermining the youth," Karki, who became interim prime minister on 12 September after the protests ousted the KP Sharma Oli-led coalition government.

'ELECTIONS CANNOT SOLVE ALL PROBLEMS'

Former king Gyanendra Shah said that the upcoming election alone cannot resolve all of Nepal's problems in a video statement. He called for an all-side consensus before the 5 March polls.

"Every patriotic Nepali feels that the country's identity and existence are under threat," he stated. "The time has now come to introspect on what those various changes have actually delivered to Nepal?" said Shah *—Agencies*

Interim Prime Minister Sushila Karki on 76th Democracy Day in Kathmandu, on Thursday—*@PMSUSHILAKARKI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Peru's Congress elects 8th Prez in 10 years

LIMA, 19 FEB

Peru's Congress on Wednesday elected legislator **José María Balcázar** as the country's eighth President in a decade, replacing interim leader José Jerí, who was ousted over corruption allegations just four months into his term. Balcázar, an 83-year-old former judge representing the leftist Perú Libre party, defeated three other candidates with a majority of the 130-member legislature. Lawmakers have frequently used a broad interpretation of a constitutional article regarding "permanent moral incapacity" to remove sitting presidents. Since 2021, Pedro Castillo, Dina Boluarte and Jerí have been impeached. Balcázar will serve five months before elections are held on 12 April. *—PTI*

37 killed in Nigeria mine gas leak

ABUJA, 19 FEB

A toxic gas leak at a mine in north-central Nigeria killed 37 people and led to the hospitalisation of 26 others, according to police. The incident occurred in Kampani Zurak community in the Wase area of Plateau state, police spokesman Alfred Alabo said. "Preliminary investigation revealed that the miners were affected due to a sudden discharge of lead oxide and other associated gases like sulphur and carbon monoxide which are toxic and poisonous to humans," he said. "The corpses of the deceased victims have been released to their families for burial according to their religious practices." *—PTI*

Former S Korean prez Yoon gets lifer for martial law bid

SEOUL, 19 FEB

Former South Korean president **Yoon Suk Yeol** was sentenced to life in prison on Thursday for his imposition of martial law while in power. Yoon is likely to appeal the verdict.

Judge Jee Kui-youn found Yoon guilty of rebellion. The court ruled that Yoon's mobilisation of the military and law enforcement was an illegal attempt to seize the National Assembly, arrest political rivals, and maintain unchecked power.

The court also sentenced several former officials. Most notably, former defence minister Kim Yong-hyun received a 30 year prison term for his role in the martial law decree.

As Yoon arrived in court on Thursday, hundreds of police officers watched closely as Yoon supporters rallied outside a judicial complex, their cries rising as the prison bus transporting him drove past. While Yoon's critics gathered nearby, demanding the death penalty.

Yoon was suspended in December 2024 and impeached in April 2025. He was arrested last July.

Yoon, however, has defended his martial law decree as 'necessary' to stop what he called "anti-state" liberal forces from blocking his agenda in the legislature. *—PTI*

Pakistan threatens Afghan after militant strike kills 12

ISLAMABAD, 19 FEB

Pakistan has issued a demarche to Afghanistan's Taliban regime over the alleged use of Afghan soil for a recent terrorist attack that claimed the lives of 11 soldiers, the Foreign Office said on Thursday.

Eleven soldiers and one civilian were killed when terrorists rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into a security check post in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur area on Monday.

The demarche was issued on Wednesday afternoon, when the Afghan Deputy Head of Mission was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a release said.

The Foreign Office expressed concern that the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), whose entire leadership is based in Afghanistan, "operates with impunity from Afghan soil".

It re-emphasised that Pakistan had received repeated assurances from the Afghan Taliban regime, "but, regrettably, with no visible or concrete actions".

"The Afghan Taliban regime has been told to take immediate, concrete and verifiable measures against all terror groups operating from its territory, including their leadership," it said.

The ministry also "categorically informed" the Afghan Taliban that Pakistan "reserved the right to respond and eliminate any khawarij belonging to the group as well as their affiliates", wherever they were located, "to ensure [the] safety of its soldiers, civilians and territorial boundaries". *—PTI*

OUTCOMES OF GENEVA MEETINGS INSUFFICIENT: ZELENSKYY

KYIV, 19 FEB

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated on Wednesday that the outcomes of the trilateral talks with the US and Russia in Geneva were "insufficient". The next meeting is scheduled for later this month.

Zelenskyy noted that while military representatives held substantive discussions, sensitive politics, possible compromises, the necessary meeting of leaders have not yet been sufficiently worked through. "We are counting on the next meeting," he said.

According to the Russian news agency TASS, Ukraine's Secretary Rustem Umerov and majority leader David Arakhamia participated in Geneva talks with Russian lead negotiator Vladimir Medinsky.

The Geneva discussions follow two rounds of negotiations brokered by the US, held in the UAE in January and early February. The talks are part of ongoing global efforts, mediated by the US, to come to a settlement on the war nearly four year war of Ukraine and Russia from February 2022. *—ANI*

1st Board of Peace meet today as Vatican says no to membership

WASHINGTON, 19 FEBRUARY

US President Donald Trump is set to chair the Board of Peace meeting in Washington on Thursday (local time) while the Vatican declined joining the board altogether. The US had earlier asked Pope Leo XIV to be part of the Board.

Trump will make an announcement regarding the USD 5 billion pledged for Gaza by 20 member states attending the meeting, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said. He will address the gathering in the Donald J Trump US Institute of Peace, a building he renamed after himself.

Trump may also announce the deployment of the International Stabilisation Force, sending thousands of troops to Gaza.

The Board of Peace, which includes Israeli but not Palestinian representatives will be meeting for the first time since the Israel-Hamas ceasefire in October.

Although it was initially designed to oversee Gaza's post-war transition under the deal, Trump has since expanded its mandate to promote "global peace" in an apparent bid to rival the UN.

Notably, its charter has been altered to allow Trump to serve indefinitely as its chairman. *—Agencies*

Mamdani reboots homeless encampment

NEW YORK, 19 FEB

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said the city will resume clearing homeless encampments following a pause in the policy.

The move follows 19 freezing to death , mounting criticism of the city's response. Mamdani's office claims there was no evidence that the people who died were living in the encampments.

Mamdani had accused former mayor Eric Adam's flagship policy for not doing enough to house the homeless. But the surge of deaths raised questions about Mamdani's experience. Democrats on Wednesday touted the new policy as more humane. *—PTI*

Air Force One to be painted red, white, blue

POTUS's Air Force One jet will be a red, white, gold and dark blue paint scheme, the military said on Thursday. Boeing is in the process of modifying two of its 747-800 aircraft that are slated to replace the existing fleet of aging Boeing 747-200 that the President currently uses. Trump said he wants "power blue, not baby blue". However, Air Force said darker colours will increase costs and delay delivery.

Don hosts Black History event

Trump hosted a White House reception for Black History Month on Wednesday, less than two weeks after posting a racist video depicting former president Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle Obama, as primates. Trump didn't comment on the video, but lauded Black Americans, like rapper Nicki Minaj, whose skin he described as "so beautiful".

Sewage crisis in DC

Washington DC, Mayor Muriel Bowser declared an emergency on Wednesday as a sewage system leak dumped 250 million gallons of sewage into the Potomac River. She requested Trump provide federal resources to help repair the environmental and health hazard.

—WIKIPEDIA

1st woman Palestinian envoy Leila Shahid dies

RAMALLAH, 19 FEB

Leila Shahid, the first woman Palestinian diplomat, who held prominent posts in Europe during some of the most tumultuous years of the Middle East conflict, has died in France at the age of 76. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas praised her as a "model of diplomacy committed to the values of freedom, justice and peace," saying "she remained faithful to her people's message until her final days," according to the official WAFA news agency. Shahid was born in Beirut in 1949, a year after the war surrounding Israel's establishment, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes. She served as envoy to France, the European Union, Belgium and Luxembourg and was with Yasser Arafat before he died in 2004. *—PTI*

EPSTEIN FILES AFTERMATH

King 'deeply concerned' over brother's arrest

LONDON, 19 FEB

King Charles III has expressed his "deepest concern" over the arrest of his brother, former prince Andrew, on suspicion of misconduct in public office. In a statement released by Buckingham Palace, Charles said, "What now follows is the full, fair and proper process by which this issue is investigated in the appropriate manner and by the appropriate authorities. In this, as I have said before, they have our full and wholehearted support and co-operation."

He emphasised that "the law must take its course" and added, "As this process continues, it would not be right for me to comment further on this matter. Meanwhile, my family and I will continue in our duty and service to you all." His Majesty's statement came after Thames Valley Police confirmed early morning searches at two addresses linked to Andrew.

- Police did not name Andrew, 66, but confirmed they were assessing allegations that he shared confidential government reports with Epstein

The 77-year-old monarch being heckled by members of the public during royal visits. Prince William and Kate Middleton's office had also been forced to issue a statement on behalf of the Prince and Princess of Wales as the royal circles came under mounting pressure over the Epstein Files.

Police did not name Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, 66, but confirmed they were assessing allegations that he shared confidential government reports with Jeffrey Epstein, and details of trips to Asia in 2010 and 2011. The allegations stem from newly released correspondence and include claims of a visit report and an investment opportunity in Afghanistan.

Andrew has denied any wrongdoing.

Buckingham Palace reiterated that King Charles would support the police if approached, and Prime Minister Keir Starmer said, "No one is above the law." *—AGENCIES*

Domestic abuse now legal if no bones broken: Taliban

KABUL, 19 FEB

—PTI

A new 90-page penal code signed by Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada 'legalises' domestic violence by allowing husbands to physically 'punish' wives and children as long as "no broken bones or open wounds".

For "obscene force" causing fractures, husbands face just 15 days' jail. Conviction requires women to prove abuse in court while fully covered and with by their abuser or a male chaperon.

A married woman visiting relatives without permission can be jailed for three months. Article 9 divides society into ulama, ashraf, middle and lower classes, with punishment determined by status: scholars receive advice, elites a summons and advice, the middle class imprisonment, and the "lower class" impris onment and corporal punishment by clerics.

The code abolishes the 2009 Elimination of Violence Against Women. Rights groups said many fear discussing it as doing so is an offence.

Rawadari urged an "immediate halt of the implementation of the criminal procedure code" and to "utilise all legal instruments". UN rapporteur Reem Alsalem said its implications are "simply terrifying" and asked: "Will the international community prove them wrong? And if so when?" *—AGENCIES*

Jio, Reliance to invest ₹10L cr in AI over 7 yrs

This will connect every citizen, business & govt services to AI

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Billionaire **Mukesh Ambani** on Thursday announced a Rs 10 lakh crore investment in artificial intelligence (AI) over the next seven years, pledging to do with AI what his group had achieved with making mobile and internet data affordable and accessible across India.

Speaking at the India AI Impact Summit, Ambani said the initiative will connect every citizen, business, and government service to AI, echoing the transformative scale of Jio's digital revolution.

"Jio connected India to the Internet Era. Jio will now connect India to the Intelligence Era...India cannot afford to rent intelligence. Therefore, we will reduce the cost of intelligence as dramatically as we did in the case of data," Ambani, Chairman and Managing Director of Reliance Industries Ltd, said.

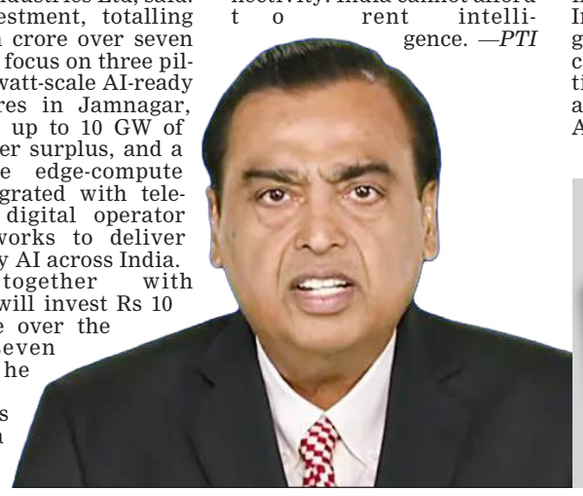
The investment, totalling Rs 10 lakh crore over seven years, will focus on three pillars - gigawatt-scale AI-ready data centres in Jamnagar, leveraging up to 10 GW of green power surplus, and a nationwide edge-compute layer integrated with telecom and digital operator Jio's networks to deliver low-latency AI across India.

"Jio, together with Reliance, will invest Rs 10 lakh crore over the next seven years," he said.

"This is not a speculative investment. It is not for chasing valuation. This is patient, disciplined, nation-building capital - designed to create durable economic value and strategic resilience for decades to come."

Stating that telecom operator Jio will play an even bigger role in India's AI transformation, he said it will deliver intelligence to every citizen, every sector of the economy, every facet of social development, and every service of government.

"Jio will do so with the same reliability, quality, scale, and extreme affordability that transformed connectivity. India cannot afford to rent intelligence. —*PTI*



Tech giants meet at AI Impact Summit

'AI ushering in an era of hyper progress'

SUNDAR PICHAI, GOOGLE CEO

Sundar Pichai on Thursday described artificial intelligence (AI) as ushering in an era of "hyper progress", with the potential to unlock new scientific discoveries and help emerging economies bypass traditional development stages.

Pichai said no technology has made him "dream bigger" than AI, highlighting its transformative potential across science, education, and economic growth.

Google will build four new subsea fibre optic cable systems between India and the United States, positioning the project as a cornerstone of broader AI and digital infrastructure expansion, he said. He outlined an ambitious vision for AI, calling it "the biggest platform shift of our lifetimes" and urging governments, companies and institutions to pursue the technology boldly and responsibly.

Pichai said Google is establishing a full-stack AI hub in Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh as part of its previously announced $15 billion infrastructure investment in India. The facility will house gigawatt-scale compute capacity and a new international subsea cable gateway, aimed at expanding jobs and AI access across India. —*PTI*

Meta's Chief AI Officer Alexandr Wang, Alphabet and Google CEO Sundar Pichai, PM Narendra Modi, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Anthropic's CEO Dario Amodei & Sarvam co-founder Pratyush Kumar during the India AI Impact Summit 2026, in New Delhi, on Thursday. Rival tech honchos Altman & Amodie did not hold hands —*PTI*

'India must create its own AI infra'

JEET ADANI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADANI GROUP

Adani Group executive director Jeet Adani said India must architect its own artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure rather than rely on imports, and must secure sovereignty to safeguard its AI future.

'AGI coming within five years'

DEMIS HASSABIS, GOOGLE DEEPMIND CEO

Demis Hassabis said that Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) is approaching "maybe within the next five years". AGI is a type of AI that can understand, learn and apply the information in various tasks like a human being.

'India can become hub of AI application'

RISHAD PREMJI, WIPRO LTD EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

Rishad Premji said that India has the opportunity to become one of the world's most consequential environments for AI application, but India's advantage will be defined by the choices it makes.

'Democratising AI is the only way forward'

SAM ALTMAN, OPENAI CEO

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman on Thursday said he shares concerns about the concentration of AI power in the hands of a country or a company.

He believes that the only path forward is to "heavily democratise" the technology and put tools in the hands of people, even if it comes with challenges and downsides.

Responding to a question from PTI, Altman said that all my study of history suggests that concentrating all of the AI power in the hands of one company or country, even if it was in the name of safety, would be a "disastrously bad" thing to do.

"I do share the concern about concentration of AI. Our stance is that the only path forward is to heavily democratise AI and to put these tools in the hands of people, even if it comes with some downsides, even if it means that society has got to wrestle with some big challenges," he said.

OpenAI, he said, invented the strategy called iterative deployment that allows people to become familiar with AI innovations, use it even when it's imperfect, even when it has flaws. —*PTI*

'India among Microsoft's top AI investment hubs'

BRAD SMITH, MICROSOFT VICE-CHAIRMAN & PRESIDENT

India is one of the largest investment destinations for Microsoft, as there is a need to harness private capital, investments from tech companies, and government funding to generate demand for the use of AI in the Global South, Brad Smith said.

'India can play central role in addressing AI misuse'

DARIO AMODEI, ANTHROPIC CEO

India has a central role to play amid challenges around autonomous behaviour of Artificial Intelligence, their potential for being misused, and for having the capability of economic displacement, Dario Amodei said.

Karnataka, Poland to build AI, Gaming & Deep-Tech Corridor

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

The Karnataka government on Thursday signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) with Polish entities to build an AI, Gaming and Deep-Tech Innovation Corridor, officials said.

In a significant step towards strengthening India–Poland innovation cooperation, the state government's Department of Electronics, IT/BT and Science & Technology signed the LoI with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Katowice, Poland, along with Kato.hub sp. z o.o., operating as the Katowice Gaming and Technology Hub, they said.

The signing took place at the Karnataka State Pavilion at the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi, officials added.

According to an official statement, this collaboration builds on initial discussions held during the Bengaluru Tech Summit and formalises a shared intent to establish structured cooperation between Karnataka and the Katowice region across innovation-led sectors. —*PTI*

TCS and OpenAI to build 100MW AI infra

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

It was a landmark day for OpenAI in India on Thursday as the US artificial intelligence major struck strategic deals with Tata Group and Jio.

Tata Group and OpenAI announced a multi-year partnership anchored by plans to build 100 megawatts (MW) of AI infrastructure in India, scalable to 1 gigawatt (GW).

The initiative will support next-generation AI workloads and aims to position India as a global AI hub.

Under the agreement, Tata Consultancy Services' HyperVault unit will develop AI-ready, green-energy-powered infrastructure, including purpose-built, liquid-cooled data centres with high rack densities and connectivity across key cloud regions. In the initial phase, TCS will build 100MW of capacity, with the option to scale to 1GW.

The collaboration will also see several thousand Tata Group employees gain access to Enterprise ChatGPT to boost productivity and innovation, while TCS will use OpenAI's Codex to enhance software engineering outcomes.

The companies plan to jointly develop industry-specific, agentic AI solutions and pursue go-to-market initiatives to deploy OpenAI's platforms for Indian and global enterprises. —*PTI*

ChatGPT to suggest links from JioHotstar

OpenAI's ChatGPT will now recommend and share streaming links available on JioHotstar for users searching for entertainment content on the AI platform following a pact among the entities, a joint statement said on Thursday. JioHotstar and OpenAI have also collaborated to introduce a ChatGPT-powered voice. The companies claim it to be the first-of-its-kind innovation for India. —*PTI*

RS 8,175 CR INVESTMENT

Waaree to set up India's largest battery gigafactory in Andhra

AMARAVATI, 19 FEB

In a major boost to India's clean-energy manufacturing and self-reliance, Waaree Energies will establish India's largest integrated lithium-ion battery Gigafactory in Andhra Pradesh with an investment of Rs 8,175 crore.

The project will come up at Rambilli in Anakapalli district and is expected to generate around 3,000 direct jobs.

The greenfield facility will have a capacity of 16 GWh and will cover the complete battery value chain, including cell manufacturing, battery packs and large-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).

The project has received in-principle approval from the Andhra Pradesh State Investment Promotion Board, chaired by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

Welcoming the investment, Nara Lokesh said this project marks a significant milestone in Andhra Pradesh's clean-energy journey.

"Waaree's gigafactory will be India's largest battery manufacturing plant and will play a critical role in reducing import dependence while strengthening domestic manufacturing in a strategic sector," Lokesh said.

- Large-scale battery manufacturing is essential for supporting renewable energy expansion, electric mobility and grid stability, while also enhancing India's strategic manufacturing independence.

The project aligns with the Government of Andhra Pradesh's vision of building a fully integrated clean-energy ecosystem across power generation, equipment manufacturing and energy storage.

Under the state's Integrated Clean Energy Policy, Andhra Pradesh has already attracted major investments in renewable power and solar manufacturing, and the Waaree battery gigafactory represents the next step in backward integration into advanced energy storage.

Large-scale battery manufacturing is essential for supporting renewable energy expansion, electric mobility and grid stability, while also enhancing India's strategic manufacturing independence.

With this landmark investment, Andhra Pradesh continues to emerge as one of the country's leading destinations for clean-technology manufacturing. —*PTI*

Oil prices gain 4% in 2 days amid US-Iran tensions

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Oil prices rose on Thursday with US and Iran trying to ease a standoff in talks over Tehran's nuclear programme. The crude prices recorded over 4 per cent rise in two days.

Meanwhile, both the countries have heightened military activity in the oil-producing region.

Brent futures climbed 23 cents, or 0.3 per cent to $70.58 a barrel by 0735 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude gained 25 cents, or 0.4 per cent. to trade at $65.44 a barrel.

Both benchmarks settled over 4 per cent higher on Wednesday, as traders priced in the risk of supply disruptions in the event of a conflict.

Iranian state media reported the country had shut down the Strait of Hormuz for a few hours on 17 February. About 20 per cent of the world's oil supply passes through the waterway.Iran issued a notice to airmen (NOTAM) that it plans rocket launches in areas across its south, while US deployed warships near Iran. US was also considering whether to continue diplomatic engagement with Tehran or pursue "another option". —*Agencies*

Investors' wealth erodes by nearly ₹7 lakh cr amid geopolitical tensions

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

Investors' wealth was eroded by nearly Rs 7 lakh crore on Thursday as the stock markets took a heavy beating with the BSE Sensex tumbling 1,236 points or 1.5 per cent amid escalating geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,236.11 points, or 1.48 per cent, to settle at 82,498.14. During the day, the benchmark nosedived 1,470.05 points, or 1.75 per cent, to hit an intraday low of 82,264.20.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms slumped by Rs 6.79 lakh crore (Rs 6,79,210.1 crore) to Rs 465 lakh crore (Rs 4,65,22,014.57 crore (USD 5.13 trillion).

Selling pressure was widespread, led by IndiGo, followed by Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, Trent, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Adani Ports, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Reliance Industries, Tech Mahindra, ITC, Eternal and PowerGrid.

The sharp selloff in equities today was triggered by news of an imminent US strike on Iran.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 880.49 crore on Thursday, while domestic institutional investors were also the net sellers of stocks worth Rs 596.28 crore, according to the exchange data.—*PTI*

Embraer andMahindra to launch maintenance & repair facility in India

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

Brazilian aircraft maker Embraer has announced plans to establish a maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facility in India for the C-390 Millennium aircraft, in partnership with the Mahindra Group, following its selection in the Indian Air Force's Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA) programme.

The facility will offer comprehensive services, including heavy maintenance, structural inspections, component overhaul, avionics support, and training, ensuring high operational readiness and availability of the fleet.

Embraer and Mahindra had signed a strategic partnership in October to produce the multi-mission C-390 in India, aligning with the 'Make in India' initiative and supporting the IAF's future aircraft needs. The C-390 can carry up to 26 tonnes and perform cargo and troop transport, airdrops, medical evacuation, fire fighting, and humanitarian missions. It operates from temporary runways and can be configured for air-to-air refuel.

The facility aims to support the IAF fleet, position India as a regional hub for C-390 maintenance, generate high-skill employment, and integrate Indian companies into Embraer's global supply chain. —*PTI*

West Indies beat Italy by 42 runs to enter Super 8s

Bennett, Raza power Zimbabwe to 6-wicket win over SL

KOLKATA, 19 FEB

Shai Hope's second consecutive fifty and a disciplined performance by bowlers powered West Indies to a comfortable 42-run victory over Italy, signing off their Group C campaign in the T20 World Cup in style, here Thursday.

Despite a shaky batting performance, the Caribbean pace and spin attack clicked in unison, ensuring a winning momentum heading into the Super Eights.

Set a target of 166, Italy were bowled out for 123 in 18 overs with Matthew Forde (3/19), Shamar Joseph (4/30) and Gudakesh Motie (2/24) doing the bulk of the damage with the ball for West Indies.

Skipper Hope slammed a 46-ball 75 to guide West Indies to 165/6 after Italy opted to field.Hope's fluent knock with six fours and four sixes held the innings together, but experienced spinners Ben Manenti (2/37) and Crishan Kalugamage (2/25) choked the run flow in the back end to keep the total in check.

On a batting-friendly Eden surface with a lightning outfield, where England's 202 was nearly chased down by Italy in the previous game, the target looked underwhelming at the innings break. West Indies 165 for 6 (Hope 75, Kalugamage 2-25, B Manenti 2-37) beat Italy 123 (B Manenti 26, Joseph 4-30, Forde 3-19, Motie 2-24) by 42 runs

West Indies' players celebrate after winning the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 Group C match against Italy –PTI

Skipper Harry warns Italy's trajectory may stall without opportunities

Stand-in captain Harry Manenti did not hide his frustration, saying Italy are on a strong "trajectory" but it could "drop off" if they do not get enough regular cricket at this level.

Italy's T20 World Cup debut was over with West Indies on Thursday, securing a facile 42-run win in their last Group C fixture to cruise to Super Eights with four wins out of four. Italy had many memories to cherish, including a win against Nepal and giving England a scare while defending 202.

They also had their moments against West Indies here on Thursday when they restricted them to 165/6 after the two-time champions were looking at 2a 00-plus total.

Brian Bennett's measured fifty and Sikandar Raza's raw power propelled Zimbabwe to a facile six-wicket win over a fancied Sri Lanka as the Africans entered the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup with a clean slate, here on Thursday.

Chasing 179 on a rather sluggish surface, Zimbabwe needed pragmatism and force in equal measure, and those elements were offered to them by Bennett (63 not out, 48 balls) and Raza (45, 26b) respectively. Zimbabwe scaled down the target in 19.3 overs. Both teams have already entered the Super Eights from Group B, and the African outfit can be proud of their show in the group phase, as they also defeated Australia in an earlier match.

Sikandar Raza and Brian Bennett –PTI

The African side started quite well, reaching 55 for no loss in the Power Play segment, thanks to openers Bennett and Tadiwanashe Marumani (34, 26b).

In all, they added 69 runs for the first wicket in 8.3 overs before Marumani fell to Dunith Wellalage, offering the left-arm spinner a return catch.

Zimbabwe 182 for 4 (Bennett 63*, Raza 45, Hemantha 2-36) beat Sri Lanka 178 for 7 (Nissanka 62, Rathnayake 44, Cremer 2-27, Evans 2-35) by six wickets. —*PTI*

ICC T20 WORLD CUP

Australia seeks to end forgettable campaign on a high note

PALLEKELE, 19 FEB

Australia will look to end one of their most calamitous World Cup campaigns on a positive note when they meet minnows Oman in their inconsequential final outing of this year's T20 showpiece here on Friday.

Australia, the limited-overs titans with six ODI and one T20I World Cup titles, were eliminated in the group stage after Tuesday's game between Zimbabwe and Ireland in Kandy was washed out, which paved the way for the much-improved African side's entry into the Super Eights from Group B along with tournament co-hosts Sri Lanka.

An injury-ravaged Australia showed glimpses of their batting prowess in the first half of their innings in the loss against Sri Lanka, but it was their shock defeat to Zimbabwe that really blew their campaign apart, forcing the administrators back home to announce a "forensic review" of their performance once the players return to the country.

The forgettable campaign was marked by injuries to key players, poor form, and baffling selection calls. The result was that the 2021 winners failed to progress beyond the group stage for the first time since 2009.

Australia set to conduct forensic review of disastrous T20WC campaign

Former champions Australia are set to conduct a "forensic review" of their disappointing T20 World Cup campaign after the injury-ravaged team crashed out in the group stage of the ongoing event being co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

The 2021 champions exited after losing to Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, a minnow. They still have one match remaining against Oman in Pallekele on Friday, but that would be inconsequential.

Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka have advanced to the Super Eights, while Australia failed to reach the group stage for the first time since 2009. Selector Tony Dodemaide said a full review of the performance would be done once the players are back home. "It's really disappointing the way the tournament has rolled out," Dodemaide was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au. "But we will need some time, and take some time, once we finish our last commitment we must finish strongly on Friday against Oman then we'll get back and analyse it fully." The match starts at 7 PM

Shivam Dube is India's silent hero this T20 World Cup

India all-rounder Shivam Dube is rapidly enhancing his credentials as a premier power-hitter with impactful performances in the ongoing T20 World Cup. After crucial cameos on tricky pitches against Namibia and Pakistan, Dube overcame a slow start to provide much-needed momentum to India's innings in the middle overs against the Netherlands here on Wednesday. Tested by off-spinner Aryan Dutt initially and managing six off his first 11 balls, Dube stepped on the accelerator to end with a match-winning 31-ball 66, including half a dozen sixes. Playing in his second T20 World Cup, Dube was always known for his six-hitting prowess against the spinners, but now he has made himself equally effective against the pacers. His improved play against fast bowlers was on display against the Netherlands as he read the pace variations well from the hand of Logan van Been to dispatch him for three maximums.

-PTI

Iconic Ladakh Marathon to return in September

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Ladakh Marathon, the world's highest AIMS-certified marathon, will return for its 13th edition on September 10 and will culminate on September 13, the organisers announced on Thursday. One of the most challenging tests of endurance and human capacity in the world, registrations for all six races of the Ladakh Marathon, including the curated Silk Route Ultra (122km) and Khardung La Challenger (72km) ultra races, opened on Thursday and can be applied to through the official website. Beyond the two ultras, the event will feature the Marathon (42km).—*PTI*

-X/@MOTOGP

MotoGP to move Australian GP to Adelaide from 2027

PARIS, 19 FEB

The Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix will move to Adelaide from next year after organisers favoured a street circuit, ending a nearly three-decade run on Phillip Island. MotoGP Sports Entertainment Group and the South Australian State government on Thursday said they had signed a six-year agreement, with the first Adelaide race to be held in November 2027. "This landmark event will be the first MotoGP Grand Prix to be held in a city-centre location, with the uncompromised safety standards required in the modern era of the sport," they said in a joint statement. Unlike Formula One, MotoGP has never held a street race, primarily due to safety concerns. Dimopoulos said the government had baulked at the owner's preference for shifting the event to Melbourne's Albert Park—*PTI*

VAISHNAVI ADKAR STORMS INTO QUARTERFINALS

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

India's Vaishnavi Adkar battled past eighth seed Mai Hontama in a pulsating three-set encounter to storm into the quarterfinals of the ITF Women's Open W100 here on Thursday. Vaishnavi defeated her Japanese opponent 2-6, 6-4, 7-6(8). The 21-year-old Indian had to dig deep after a slow start as Hontama came out sharp, covering the baseline superbly and capitalising on Adkar's early errors to break in the second game.

Dictating rallies with consistency and depth, the Japanese player carried that momentum through to take the opening set 6-2. Adkar, however, transformed the contest in the second set.

—*PTI*

PAKISTAN HOCKEY CONTROVERSY

PHF chief resigns, coach also offers to step down

SYDNEY, 19 FEB

Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) president Tariq Bugti has resigned in the aftermath of the hotel-payment fiasco that marred the national team's troubled tour of Australia earlier this month.

Bugti confirmed on Thursday that he had submitted his resignation to the PHF patron-in-chief, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

"I have sent my resignation letter to the PM, but I urge him and Field Marshal Asim Munir to conduct an impartial inquiry into the whole incident which took place in Australia during the FIH Pro League," Bugti said.

The controversy erupted after a video surfaced on social media showing Pakistani players standing on a Sydney street with their luggage. Soon after it went viral, Pakistan captain Shakeel Ammad Butt released another clip insisting everything was fine and there were no issues with the team's stay. But days later, after returning home, Butt struck a sharply different tone at a press conference in Lahore, blaming the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) for mismanagement during what he called a chaotic tour. In another video, Butt claimed the players not only had to wander the streets due to a lack of accommodation, but were also forced to "wash dishes before playing a match."

He also alleged that nine players had not received their daily allowances from the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) and PHF for the past year.

The players questioned why the government had released funds to the PHF for Pakistan's participation in all three phases of the FIH Pro League, yet the team still suffered logistical failures in Australia, where the second phase concluded earlier this week.

Butt's criticism, however, came at a cost. PHF president Bugti imposed a two-year ban on the skipper, accusing him of bringing disrepute to Pakistan hockey.

Bugti's resignation comes amid a widening fallout, with the PHF and the state-run PSB trading blame for the fiasco. Bugti said the PSB handled all arrangements for the Australia tour and was responsible for the disaster. —*PTI*

Karnataka batter R Smaran scored centuries in both innings against Uttarakhand –*PTI*

Ranji Trophy 2025-26: K'taka qualifies for first final in 11 years

UTTARAKHAND, 19 FEB

Karnataka has qualified for its first Ranji Trophy final in 11 years after taking a first-innings lead against Uttarakhand in the semifinal at the Ekana Stadium in Lucknow on Thursday, February 19.

R. Smaran (127) and K.L. Rahul (86 not out) piled on the runs in the second innings as Karnataka built a massive lead of 826 midway through the first session on the fifth day.

Though it stood no chance of chasing 827, Uttarakhand batted again. Shreyas Gopal took three wickets, while Avneesh Sudha struck a brisk half-century before the sides shook hands with the score at 184 for six.

Play appeared over on the cusp of tea, with presentation boards even being set up, but it was later confirmed that the match referee had not called the match off due to the possibility of an outright result. Play was eventually called off after nearly an hour of the final session, with Abhay Negi (57 not out) and Saurabh Rawat (53 not out) both raising half-centuries.

Earlier, captain Devdutt Padikkal (232) led Karnataka's charge in the first innings, with Smaran (135) and Rahul (141) providing strong support as the side posted 736. Vidyadhar Patil and V. Vyshak then claimed three wickets each as Uttarakhand were bowled out for 233, giving Karnataka a first-innings lead of 503.

Karnataka's only concern is Padikkal's fitness, as he did not bat in the second innings after taking a blow to the hand while fielding.

Karnataka will now face Jammu & Kashmir in the final, scheduled from 24 to 28 February. —*PTI*

ANDREY RUBLEV ARRANGES POSSIBLE CARLOS ALCARAZ CLASH IN DOHA

QATAR, 19 FEB

The Russian faced Stefanos Tsitsipas in the quarter-final and delivered a 6-3, 7-6 victory in an hour and 35 minutes on Thursday.

Thus, Andrey remained on the course toward his fourth final at this event, although he could meet world no. 1 Carlos Alcaraz in the next round. Rublev and Tsitsipas battled for the first time since the 2022 ATP Finals.The Russian secured his sixth victory after a rock-solid performance. The 5th seed claimed ten points more than his rival. Andrey defended all five break points and created two break points in the opener.

Tsitsipas failed to save them, trailing but raising his level in the second set before falling short in the tie break. Rublev dominated with his forehand and tamed his strokes nicely. Stefanos held at love in game seven and made another push on the return in the next one.

Rublev denied a break point with fine smashes and a forehand winner before firing an ace for 5-3.Frustrated after wasting five break points in back-to-back games, Tsitsipas got broken at love in game nine, with the 5th seed landing a forehand return winner for 6-3 in 42 minutes. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal blow 2-goal lead in damaging Wolves draw

LONDON, 19 FEB

Arsenal's Premier League title challenge suffered a major blow as they squandered a two-goal lead and conceded a stoppage-time equaliser in a damaging 2-2 draw at rock-bottom Wolves on Wednesday night. Mikel Arteta's side were on course to move seven points clear at the top after Bukayo Saka's early opener and Piero Hincapie's second-half strike put them in control at Molineux. But Arsenal collapsed in the closing stages as Hugo Bueno reduced the deficit before Riccardo Calafiori turned Tom Edozie's shot into his own net in the final seconds after a mix-up between goalkeeper David Raya and centre-back Gabriel Magalhaes, to leave the visitors shell-shocked.

Failing to kill off the table Wolves was a devastating setback for Arsenal –X/@PL

For a second successive league game, the Gunners had failed to hold onto a lead following their 1-1 draw at Brentford last Thursday.

Failing to kill off bottom-of-the-table Wolves was a devastating setback for Arsenal, who have won just two of their last seven league matches, offering renewed hope to second-placed Manchester City in the title race. City are just five points behind Arsenal and have a game in hand on their rivals, as well as a home game against the Gunners in April.

Having wasted commanding leads in two previous title fights with City, Arteta's men are in danger of being haunted by the ghost of their past failures. Arsenal looked increasingly nervous as the minutes ticked down against Wolves in a clear sign that the league leaders are feeling the pressure of their bid for a first English title since 2004. —*PTI*

Nasa Hataoka leads in LPGA Thailand

CHONBURI, 19 FEB

Nasa Hataoka shot a 7-under 65 Thursday on the Siam Country Club Old Course and was tied for the lead after the opening round at the LPGA Thailand, the first of three tournaments in Asia in consecutive weeks.

Hataoka, who was runner-up at the 2021 U.S. Women's Open, has won five individual LPGA tournaments and two in the International Crown team event.

She was tied on Thursday with Thailand's Chanettee Wannasaen. Gemma Dryburgh, who opened her round with an eagle and three birdies, was a stroke behind with a 66 and level with Somi Lee and Hye-Jin Choi.

Top-ranked Jeeno Thitikul and Lydia Ko shot 67s and were in a group of 10 tied for sixth. Defending champion Angel Yin had a 69.

Nelly Korda won for the first time in 14 months without having to hit a shot when the LPGA's season-opening Tournament of Champions was reduced to 54 holes on Feb. 1 because of wind and cold that made the Lake Nona course in Florida unsuitable for a final round. —*PTI*